"To think of a time in which things are not, means to think of a time in which non-nothingness is nothing. That is, it means to think of the time of the absolutely absurd, of what cannot absolutely exist. (...) (F)olly is to think that things come from nothingness and return to it, (...) non-folly (...) is the gaze of destiny seeing the eternity of every thing."

EMANUELE SEVERINO

NIHILISM AND DESTINY

MIMESIS INTERNATIONAL

EMANUELE SEVERINO
NIHILISM AND DESTINY

EDITED BY NICOLETTA CUSANO

PHILOSOPHY | CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHERS

"Two souls live within us": one is nihilism and the other is destiny. In this collection of essays, Emanuele Severino, one of the most important thinkers of contemporary times, illuminates the meaning of these words and engages with the most profound questions of philosophy, as well as the most essential matters for each one of us. This volume is precious not only because of its content, but also because it offers an international audience a preview into one of the most original philosophers of all time: this is, in fact, the first volume by Severino to be translated into English. By affirming the eternal nature inherent to each thing, he has opened up a path previously unknown to philosophy.

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n. 1

EMANUELE SEVERINO

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Translated by Kevin William Molìn

Edited by Nicoletta Cusano

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Nicoletta Cusano

INTRODUCTION

Here presented is a collection of writings by Emanuele Severino, one of the most important contemporary philosophers. His reflection is essentially characterised by the uncompromising rigour that is proper to authentic philosophy, and that has brought him to assert an understanding of the "truth" of being which had never been considered before; and which, as happens to all great thought, is destined to leave a profound mark on the course of philosophy (as it has been the case in Italy for decades). Since his works are still to be translated into English (this is in fact the first title), the choice of texts presented here—in agreement with the author himself—has been guided entirely by the aim of giving an introduction to Severino's thought, exposing its central themes with gradual conceptual progression.

The book sets off with the piece "Nihilism and Destiny", introducing us to the "two souls" that "inhabit the chest" of every human being: "nihilism" and "destiny". The succession of texts, then, gradually extends the compass of analysis to a broad range of the conceptual complexities that Severino's reflection grapples with; as a consequence, characterising this book as both introductory and expository in its form. As to the rigorous foundations of the positions here exposed, readers should refer to Severinian writings of utmost theoretical commitment, amongst which are of note: *La struttura originaria*, *Essenza del nichilismo* (whose English translation is forthcoming with Verso), *Destino della necessità*, *La Gloria*, *Oltrepassare*, *La morte e la terra* (all published by the Italian publisher Adelphi).

"Nihilism" is a dominant concern in philosophical discussions of the XX and XXI century. Severino gets to the roots of nihilism

and puts the spotlight on its essential trait as has never been done before. He shows, in fact, that nihilism does not simply consist in identifying being with nothingness, but in identifying them in the very act in which they are thought to be counterposed. True nihilism is *essentially unconscious*. When it is thought that something, before coming into existence, was nothing, and that after its existence it will return to nothingness, the thing is essentially conceived as separate (and separable) from its ties with being. And yet, thus separated, the thing is something impossible: it is a logical absurdity, a contradiction, because while it is thought as being "nothing", it is still being thought; therefore, it is still thought as something, that is, as "non-nothing". No one prior to Severino had ever reflected on this decisive aspect: if the thing is thought to be separable from its being, the thing becomes unthinkable. You cannot even remember it, and it is not possible for you to say that it has been, will be and now is. This is nihilism: not to notice that, by thinking of the becoming of things, their being is negated precisely when we think we are asserting it. To think of being as tied to a "when", to a time, has been—and is—the logical error of philosophy in the way it was born and has developed until now, to the extent that it is convinced of the *evidence* that things come from nothingness and return to it.

From Plato and Aristotle onwards, in fact, everyone has considered as unquestionable the evidence that a thing is "when it is", and that it is not "when it is not". Readers themselves may ask: is it perhaps not absolutely evident that things are in becoming, that is, that they are born, exist and then die? No, answers Severino: this is not evident. It is an interpretation. An implicit one, sure, but still an interpretation. Birth (conceived as beginning to be by emerging from nothingness) and death (conceived as the annihilation of being) are not at all phenomenologically evident, but they are the (unconscious) interpretation upon which philosophy and the civilisation of the West have been built. Many are convinced that the becoming of things is evident; but while they are convinced they are witnessing a certain appearance, they are instead interpreting it. Those who believe things come from nothingness and return to nothingness—and all Philosophy, Science, Politics, Economics, Religion, in short, the "World" thinks this way—do not reflect on the aspect reiterated just above: while they say that something is no longer or that it is not yet, they are still thinking and speaking of it as "something", that is, as "non-nothing". But in this way they conceive the thing, on the one hand, as if it were nothing; and, on the other—inasmuch as they name it and they think it as something that "is"—as if it were non-nothing. The "thing" that is thought by nihilism is thus something impossible: it is a contradiction. As if one were to try to speak of a triangle that is squared: this logical absurdity is precisely an *essent* emerging from nothingness and returning to it. This way of thinking had already been classified by Parmenides as *dìkranos* ("the two-headed mortals"). Severino defines it as "folly".

To the insanity of this way of thinking (born with philosophy and slowly, through centuries and millennia, becoming praxis and action, until it now invades every aspect of our lives), Severino counterposes an essentially authentic—that is, non-contradictory—understanding of being: that is, being as the other "soul" that lives in the chest of every human being, which he calls "de-stiny". The term destiny does not indicate "fate", but etymologically the undeniable "staying" of being (*stiny* comes from the Greek verb *ìstemi*, meaning, "to stay"). The prefix "de-" is intended in an extended sense: the staying of being is incredibly strong, unshakeable, it does not concede [*non-cede*] to its own negation. "Necessity" (from the Latin *ne-cedo*) specifically indicates, in the Severinian lexicon, the being "not conceding" to its own negation: truth is undeniable insofar as its negation is something impossible, an *immediate* self-negation. What is absolutely distinctive of Severino's argument is encapsulated exactly by this sense given to "immediacy", according to which it is immediately impossible that being could ever cease to be and negate its non-being. There cannot be, in other words, a time in which being is not.

By saying this, Severino confers a meaning to eternity that no one had hitherto ever suggested. Not even Parmenides, who had declared the eternity of the only being, pure and mono-significant. Severino, instead, argues that *every* essent is eternal. That the essent *as such* is eternal; not just the privileged essents

that, from Plato to Hegel, have been asserted in the course of the history of philosophy. Every essent, every instant, all that is not nothing, "is"; and it can neither cease to be what it is, nor cease to oppose itself to its own being nothing.

By affirming this, however, we should note that Severino does not deny the undeniable evidence of the flowing of time, that is, the process of appearance and disappearance. Quite the contrary. Severino thinks of the process in light of the eternity of being, and therefore argues that the events of birth and death—if they are thought without contradiction—are the events of the appearance and disappearance of what is eternal. In this sense, however much it may seem like Severino's thought engages with the usual concerns of the philosophical tradition, readers should keep in mind that these concerns are *essentially* transfigured from the foundation in which they are inscribed: that of the eternity of the essent as such.

Therefore, I invite readers to delve into these pages by paying close attention to the absolute novelty of the content of Severino's reflection, which is not be confused with other contents asserted along the history of philosophy. Even when the resemblance is remarkable. First and foremost, because already Severino himself refers to the content at stake as not "his own", if what we mean by "his own" is the speculative product of an intelligence. Such content, the de-stiny of being, is in fact the logical and conceptual structure at the basis of every thought and every word: the structure in which the "truth" of being and of signifying consists as a "foundation".

Since de-stiny is the profound truth at the basis of the existence of everything, it is also at the basis of the other human soul, the mad one, that of nihilism (which however cannot be recognised): "destiny" is the unconscious foundation of "nihilism". And since nihilism, in its turn, is essentially unconscious in the sense we have above indicated; Severino cannot but conclude by saying that destiny, being the unconscious foundation of nihilism, is the "unconscious of the unconscious". In this sense, in the deepest of depths of every single human being, there resides a truth; the task of authentic philosophy is to bring it to light.

EMANUELE SEVERINO

NIHILISM AND DESTINY

1.
NIHILISM AND DESTINY

At the foundation of every thought and action today, there lies the persuasion that every *thing* is ephemeral, insofar as it is subject to birth and death. This persuasion, in its turn, is founded on the central trait of philosophy in our time: the thought that no "thing" exists by necessity. We think this way, no matter how the thingness of things is understood by philosophical thought: whether the thingness is understood as reality independent of the human, or as object of experience or consciousness, or as interpretation or as language, etc.; and bearing in mind here that the word "thing" should be understood in its broadest sense—the one in which, for instance, a "thing" is a tree, a psychic state, a relation, a concept, a god. It is precisely in relation to this extremely wide sense of the thingness of things that already Kant, in Book II of the *Transcendental Dialectic* (Ch. III, Section IV, titled *Of the Impossibility of an Ontological Proof of the Existence of God*), claims that "the proposition: 'this or that thing exists' is a synthetic proposition" ["*der Satz: dieses oder jenes Ding… existirt ist… synthetischer Satz*"]. This means that when we think that a thing is not in existence, "it is not" ["*ist nicht*"]; that is, "it is nothing" ["*es ist nichts mehr*"], "in this judgement there cannot exist the least self-contradiction" ["*es zeigt sich in diesem Gedanken nicht der mindeste Widerspruch*"]. And since the existence of a thing is necessary, whenever the negation of such existence gives rise to a contradiction, no thing exists by necessity.

This Kantian thesis is perhaps the most widely shared in the philosophical thought of our time. It is essentially connected to the other Kantian thesis, that "being is not a real predicate", about which Heidegger states it "*cannot be impugned* in its nega-

tive content" (*The basic problems of phenomenology*). Just so as to give another example: Quine's critique of the distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions tends to ascribe an empirical and synthetic character even to analytic propositions. And thus, if at all possible, he reinforces the thesis that no thing exists by necessity.

Before Kant, already Hume writes at the end of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* that "whatever is may *not be*. No negation of a fact can involve a contradiction. The non-existence of any being, without exception, is as clear and distinct an idea as its existence."

But that things of the world do not exist by necessity, however, is the principle lying at the core of the most ancient philosophical thought; that is, held ever since Greek philosophy conceived the infinite opposition between *being* and *nothing*. In Greek thought, entities that appear move from non-being into being, and vice versa; and this means precisely that they do not exist by necessity. The entire Western civilisation grows out of the confidence that things, *insofar as they are things*, do not exist by necessity. For the philosophical tradition, divine things exist by necessity; but they exist by necessity not insofar as they are things, but insofar as they are divine. But then, in its deepest (and still for the most part hidden) essence, contemporary philosophy shows that divine things cannot exist (and thus, that even Kant's attempt is destined to failure, however much it tries to salvage, in the context of practical reason, those necessary and divine things which the critique of pure reason is bound to negate).

For the first time—and once and for all in the history of the West—Greek philosophy thought of the "thing" as "entity" or "essent": as "that which is". The totality of things is the totality of entities, leaving only nothingness outside of itself. That is, leaving no entity outside of itself. It is only because Greek philosophy has thought of nothingness, in its radical meaning, that it has been able to think of the entitiness and the totality of entities. And it is only because it has thought of the entitiness and the totality of entities, that it has been able to think of nothingness as the absence of every entity and as the totality

of entities. On the other hand, for Greek thought, and then for the thought of the entire West, that which is not a nothing is the entity insofar as entity. That is, it is not solely the totality of entities, but it is every entity. The "entity" is "that which is"; "being" is the "is" of that which *is*, the being of the entity. According to the West no entity, insofar as it is an entity, "is" by necessity; and this implies the power to imagine a time in which the things that are, are not. To say "when a certain entity is not" means to say "when a certain entity is nothing." To think that an entity is not, according to the West, does not entail a contradiction.

For some time, my writings have moved towards indicating another dimension to the question: pointing out, that is, that to think a time in which entities are not means to fall into the deepest, most hidden, radical and rooted contradiction, which nonetheless guides the West and already the entire Planet by now. This contradiction now implicates every aspect and instant of our existence and presents itself, in the eyes of the West and the Planet, as the supreme truth and evidence, as supremely unquestionable. Both the philosophical tradition and contemporary philosophy—and science, religion, art, in short, all forms of culture, of institutions and of the Western civilisation—are guided by the conviction that entities can be nothing and that, on the contrary, their non-being (their being the nothingness which they come from and to which they return) is unquestionably attested by the experience of becoming.

This supreme contradiction shrouds the metaphysical-religious confidence that it is out of the work of a God that something rather than nothing exists; as well as the assuredness, proper to our time, with which the world is seen as existing by chance, and the being of things as having no reason, no foundation, no explanation whatsoever. These two opposite modes of thought have the same spirit, they are shrouded by the same extreme *Folly*. This folly, however, has nothing to do with a sort of psychological or anthropological weakness that, with certain precautions, could have been avoided. What for the West is supreme evidence is supreme *Folly*. It is deeply concealed

precisely because it is assumed to be the supreme evidence. As inhabitants of the West, in *ea vivimus, movemur et sumus*. This affirmation can show its own absolute necessity only within *Non-folly*; which is not the thought of one among us, nor that of a God, although it is present in the depths of each thought and, therefore, even in the thought and action that Folly consists in. Non-Folly is the authentic and radical sense of destiny. It is the sense of what—differently from every *epistéme* of the Western tradition—has always already and forever succeeded in *staying*, counter to every possible form of its negation.

Here it will be possible only to indicate, from afar, a few traits of the essential relationship between extreme Folly and Non-Folly.

Western thought finds it wholly natural to state there is the time in which entities still are not and the time by which now they are no longer; concerning itself with establishing that, when a thing is not, it is so by necessity. Already Aristotle explicitly says so, in *De interpretatione*. Still, Western thought leaves in the most profound and unexplored obscurity the meaning of the expression "when a thing (an entity) is not"—for example, "when this day is not"—it was still not yet and it will no longer be (or "when man, trees, stars, the Earth, peace, war are not").

For Western thought, when this day is not and has become past, it is no longer. Insofar as it is past, this day is not. It is said that, in some way, even the past "is" (and the same is said of the future). In such instances, we refer to the past that remains in memory and in the traces that it has left. Still—we observe—that which remains in memory and in the traces is not past: instead, it is precisely something that remains. The past, insofar as it is past, does not remain. It "is" no longer—that is, it is non-being, nothingness.

For the Greeks and the West, nothingness, insofar as it is the absence and non-being of every entity, is not the non-being of a particular entity. Nonetheless, for this mode of thought, to state that a particular entity *is not* means to state that such particular entity is nothing. It is to state that, insofar as it is absent, it is the absence of every entity, of all that one way or another is an entity.

Apropos of non-being, without which there cannot be any becoming, Plato states in *Parmenides* (163 c-d):

> When we say that something is not, we indicate the absence of being [*ousías apousía*] in that about which we say that it is not. And, by saying that something is not, we do not state that such something in a certain sense is not, and in a certain other sense it is: this saying that it is not, instead, means absolutely that what is not is not in any sense or place, and that in no sense it partakes in being. Thus it is not possible that what is not exists, nor that in any other sense that it partakes in being. But generating and perishing are nothing other than acquiring being and losing it.

It appears, from Plato's passage, that the non-being of entities is an absolute nothingness, precisely that which "in no sense partakes in being" and "is not in any sense or place". For the generated entity, to acquire being is thus to come from its own having been an absolute nothingness; and to lose being is to enter into its own being an absolute nothingness. Plato and Aristotle certainly know that, within what is experienced as generating and perishing, the point of departure and arrival of becoming are not an absolute nothingness; but Plato and Aristotle state—as then the entire thought of the West will go on to state (even when it will not realise this)—that what is specifically generated and perishes, as such, comes from *its own* having been an absolute nothingness and re-entering it. "It is, after all, the non-being that gets produced," says Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, 1067 b, 31); and thus, what perishes is that which is.

For the entirety of Western thought—and therefore also for scientific thought—becoming manifests itself as the passage of something from being into non-being. Even if the West often cannot render explicit what it thinks, the West thinks that the non-being of the entity in becoming is the absolute non-being *of such entity*; and that, however, the situation in which *a certain entity* is not—in which it is an absolute non-being—*is not* the situation in which *no entity* is. That is, it is not the situation in which *every entity* is an absolute non-being, so that in the situation in which a certain entity is not, certain other entities can be.

And this is the case for Western thought, for the becoming that manifests itself in our experience. The point of departure and arrival of becoming in our experience are not, in other words, an absolute nothingness. Exactly for this reason, not only can Aristotle state that what generates itself is that which is absolutely nothing, and that what becomes absolutely nothing is that which is; but he can also state that becoming is the passage "from something to something"—where this "something" (point of departure and arrival of becoming) is the positive context (Aristotle calls it *substratum*) in which the entity finds itself as not being. For the West, that becoming is a passage from being into non-being (in the sense now indicated), is the originary and supreme evidence now already dominating over any other evidence—and which is experienced as evidence, even when we may not register our experiencing it in such way.

Extreme Folly is precisely this extreme plausibility that accompanies the mature form of Western ontology.

To state that, within becoming, an entity—for instance, this day—begins to be means to state that there exists a time, a time of the past, in which this day was nothing, absolutely nothing. Even when it is acknowledged that many aspects, things, and events of this day pre-exist its beginning, if it is asserted that this day begins to be, it is necessary *to negate* that *all* things, aspects and events of this day pre-exist its own beginning. If we were convinced, in fact, that *all* that which constitutes this day pre-exists the day's beginning, we could not state that this day begins to be. Therefore, the persuasion that this day begins to be entails by necessity the persuasion that, before this day begins to be, at least the *specific form* of this day "is not": it does not exist, it is nothingness, absolute nothingness. This persuasion is evident, in a more or less explicit way, in all of Western thought.

The specific form of this day is the unrepeatable configuration and timbre, precisely the specific unity, which all the elements constituting it (pre-existent or not) adopt on this day. To believe that it begins to be means to believe *at the very least* that the specific form of this day was hitherto an absolute nothingness. And to believe that this day will cease to be means, at

the very least, to believe that its specific form will once more become an absolute nothingness (even if many of its aspects and many things belonging to it will continue to be).

But the specific form of this day is not a nothing: it is an entity. *Therefore, to believe that this specific form has been nothing and will once more become nothing means to believe that there exists a time in which this entity, insofar as it is an entity, is nothingness. That is, it means to state that such an entity, insofar as it is an entity, is nothingness, absolutely nothingness.*

Identification of the entity with nothingness is stated in relation to all entities, which, according to the West, pass from non-being into being and vice versa. What for the West is supreme "evidence" of this passage is, in truth, the supreme Folly whereby thought and action are guided by such thought. Folly, that is, does not appear in the eyes of the West as Folly, as identification of the entity with nothingness. Instead, it appears precisely as "evidence", and Folly is kept outside of the consciousness that the West has of the world. Faith in the "evidence" of becoming—that faith which is the dominant and altogether essentially hidden thought of the West—therefore necessarily entails faith in the entity, insofar as it is an entity, as being a non-entity; that is, it entails faith in the entity, insofar as it is an entity, as being nothing.

This implication subsists in spite of every attestation of fidelity that the West expresses towards the principle of non-contradiction. Because if we were to ask Western thought whether it is possible that there existed a time in which the circle had become square—and therefore a time in which the circle would be square—or whether there existed a time in which one had become, and therefore is, two, then such thought would be sufficiently prepared to answer: "No", in no time or state of existence whatsoever is it possible that the circle would be square, or that one would be two. But this sensibility to contradiction (which characterises Western thought, even when it believes it can take distance from the principle of non-contradiction), this *horror contradictionis*, disappears and is totally neutralised when it is believed, instead, that there exists a time in which this day, this non-nothing, was not, in which it was nothing;

and that there will come a time in which the day will, once more, be nothing.

In the dominion of Folly, it appears that the most evident and "natural" thing to think is that entities have been nothing and will return to nothingness. But to state that *this day is* nothing *essentially differs* from stating that *nothingness* is nothing: when one thinks that *things* become nothing and, having become nothing, *are* nothing, one is not thinking of a process in which *nothingness* becomes nothing, so that at the end of such a process nothingness would be nothing. Instead, one is thinking of a process in which, specifically, *things* have become nothing and, having become nothing, *things* are nothing. "Life" is drama and tragedy, exactly because it is *about things* that their becoming nothing and being nothing is affirmed. *About things*: and above all about things we love and without which our lives would be unbearable. But precisely because it is *about things, and not about nothingness*, that the West thinks things come from nothing and return to it; exactly for this reason, the West is, in its essence, extreme Folly. It is the essential form of *nihilism*, that is, the persuasion that things insofar as they are things—entities insofar as they are entities—are nothing.

Non-Folly is the manifestation of the necessity that the entity is entity; the impossibility that an entity is nothing. Non-Folly is the manifestation of the impossibility that the entity insofar as it is an entity—that is, every entity—is not; it is the manifestation of the *eternity* of every entity. Eternal is every entity; therefore, above all, every state of the world, consciousness, and affectivity is eternal. Eternal is the past and the future, as is the present. The infinite entities not manifesting themselves are eternal, too.

Based on faith in the Greek sense of becoming, no immutable and eternal being, and no definitive and incontrovertible truth are possible. This is precisely what the essential thought of our time draws from that ancient faith. But Non-Folly radically questions faith in becoming: it is its most radical negation. Non-Folly is thus essentially (and eternally) *outside* the disdain, in our times, for the incontrovertibility and necessity of truth. However, it also stays outside the way in which the metaphysical-ontological tradition of the West has understood such incontrovertibility and necessity: the destiny of necessity is not the *epistéme*.

The conviction that essents come from nothingness and return to it, that is, the conviction that essents—non-nothings—are nothing, is both supreme Folly and extreme Violence. Not even the most shadowy of entities can be annihilated (or produced) by extreme Folly; but, within extreme Folly, entities are subjected to the extreme Violence that poses them as an absolutely nothing to modify the world. That is, the Violence that acts (believes to be acting) with the conviction it can annihilate, produce, that which instead is impossible to annihilate, produce, or create.

Extreme Violence and Folly are the hidden root out of which the history of the West begins to grow. Based on the faith that entities oscillate between being and nothingness, entities make themselves available to forces pushing them towards nothingness and towards being: entities are seen as themselves demanding to be violated. Only if they are conceived as becoming, in the Greek sense of this word, can we think their domination, production and destruction without limit; since, in their very being dominated, their essence is not denied (the essence assigned to them by extreme Folly) but they fulfil their profoundest vocation. Nihilism is external Violence and Folly.

Non-Folly as the destiny of necessity is the negation of nihilism: negation of the authentic sense proper to nihilism, and which differs essentially from every definition of nihilism suggested by Western thought. As the negation of nihilism, Non-Folly is altogether the negation of the professed "evidence" that the entity comes from nothingness and returns to it. Even here, we have to limit ourselves to give a summary indication.

That which is annihilated, for the West, is also something leaving the horizon of manifestation and appearance of entities. Inasmuch as it is believed that something coming from being then annihilates itself, it is necessary to believe that such something no longer appears; and, inasmuch as it is believed that something is still not yet anything, it is necessary to believe that such something does not appear yet. For the West, recollection does not manifest what has gone into nothingness,

but only its image; and even foresight can only anticipate the image of what is still not yet anything. When this day will have gone into nothingness, this day—the West thinks—will not remain here before us in the flesh and bones it now manifests itself in, but only its image will be manifested in the recollection.

For the West, when something goes into nothingness, it also leaves the vault of experience, the vault of appearance. Inhabitants of the West don't say that when the sun leaves the vault of the sky, it has gone into nothingness: they don't say it, because in the morning the sun returns. But if we wanted to know from the vault of the sky what fate befalls the sun after it has set, the vault of the sky would not know how to respond; it would not be able to manifest what fate befalls that which, as the sun, has left it. In the same way, when something is thought to go into nothingness, it is impossible for one to believe that the experience, the manifestation of the entity, would show the fate befalling what, having annihilated itself, has also left the realm experience and no longer appears.

Inhabitants of the West learn that, when something goes out of their experience in certain ways—for instance, in the terrible ways of violence—the return of such thing cannot be ascertained. It is at this point that they construct the *doctrine* that such something has become nothing. But, to be precise, the assertion of an annihilation of things is a *doctrine*: it is not the result of an experience; it is not something that appears and manifests itself. The annihilation of nothingness and the emergence from it are then opposites to an immediate or even supreme "evidence". Not only that, but the *doctrine* sustaining the annihilation and creation of entities is the doctrine of Folly and nihilism. It is the doctrine of the impossible, and it is impossible for the impossible to manifest itself in any experience whatsoever.

Certainly, the content of the appearance is variable; but in Non-folly the appearance of variation can neither be the appearance of the thing becoming other than itself, nor the appearance of that extreme form of becoming other which is becoming nothing (on the part of the entity) or becoming entity (on the part of nothingness). In Non-folly the appearance is not even phenomenal appearance, but it is the appearance of the entities themselves, that is, the eternals themselves. The variation that appears in Non-folly is thus the supervening of eternals in the circle of appearance, and their leaving it.

Many questions open themselves up at this point—but no longer the question asking why essents are instead of being nothing. Essents are because it would be contradictory for them not to be. Essents are because they are eternal.

But the infinite *opposition* between the essent and that which it is not, and thus between the essent and nothingness, is not an arbitrary presupposition. It is instead the destiny of every essent and every thought, because the negation of the opposition between any essent whatsoever and its other is an essent aiming to oppose itself to all that which is not, and, thus, also to nothingness. This means that negating the opposition of every essent to its other is founded upon that which it negates. That is, such negation negates itself. The opposition between every essent and its own other, and between every essent, is nothingness; it shows itself, therefore, as the necessity of the destiny of every essent and every thought.

2.
THE THING AND THE REPUBLIC

Marx writes: "Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life."

'Consciousness' is the set of cultural formations: religion, morality, juridical relations, philosophy, all that for Marx is 'ideology'. It is thus 'life', the way in which humans act and transform the world, that determines in the last instance the way in which they reflect on their own existence—and that, thus, also determines the sort of reflection philosophy consists in.

This attitude on the part of Marx, aiming to discover in concrete and immediate human life the conditions from which philosophical thought is generated, is largely present in contemporary culture. Suffice to think about Nietzsche, Freud, or the sociology of knowledge. But already the idealist Fichte, fifty years prior to Marx, stated that the choice of a philosophy depends on what kind of human being one is.

Still, the eyes with which Marx looks at 'life' are Plato's eyes—that is, those of the place around which all Greek thought is gathered.

Instead of presenting itself in its purity and independence from any ideological construction, "life" stands before Marx with the traits that, once and for all, Greek thought had assigned to it. And this has occurred to all Western culture that has attempted to discover "life" in its immediate and uncontaminated purity.

But something altogether much more decisive has also occurred: little by little, the eyes with which *"life" itself* looks have become Plato's eyes.

All the peoples of the earth by now look with these eyes. The

spectacle now standing before the masses is Greek—even if the masses have never heard a word of Greek philosophy.

Since—even for Marx—'life' looks.

It is not only looked at by philosophers. Life, in its turn, is a way of looking.

Marx uses the word 'labour' to indicate the essence of 'life'. Labour is the "activity conforming to the objective"; the activity setting its sights on to transforming things, in order to make them usable. Since it 'knows' the objective, labour is *consciousness*—and even for Marx, consciousness of the objective is the 'law' determining the way in which labour concretises itself.

This consciousness, determining labour from within, is not the 'consciousness' that is determined by labour as ideological superstructure. It is the 'life' that, as 'life', looks at 'things'.

Dinge ('things') is the precise term used by Marx, when in the first book of *Capital* he shows that labour has a "general nature" which is "independent of all forms of society", and that "the eternal natural condition of human life" is identically present in each of them.

A condition, therefore, which precedes and renders possible the constitution of every ideology.

In its 'general nature', labour is the activity that 'unties' things from the 'immediate relation' which keeps them originarily tied to the land. Such dissolution is the very production of the thing as a usable good.

Marx exemplifies the point in this way: the woodcutter cuts down the tree, separating it from the wood; the fisherman catches the fish, separating it from water; and the miner extracts the mineral from its vein.

The tree, the fish, and the mineral are 'things'. A 'thing' is, for Marx, that which lets itself be separated from its originary ties with the land. A thing is a thing precisely because it is thus separable.

As dissolved from its originary ties with the land, the thing initially appears to the worker as the objective he or she wishes 'to realise', 'to produce'.

And to realise the objective means, for Marx, 'to consume', to

destroy those ties (that is, the union of the tree with wood, of the fish with water, of the mineral with its vein).

Dissolving things from their originary ties, labour leads things *from non-being into being*: from non-being, proper to things when objectives are only 'ideally present' in the mind of workers as still unrealised, into being, proper to things when the objective realises itself. Labour specifically confers to them, Marx writes, "the form of being".

Therefore, according to Marx, in the assertion of the idea that labour is production, because labour is the cause behind any thing whatsoever passing from non-being into being, what is stated is something pertaining the 'general nature' of labour; and, thus, something constituting itself as "the eternal natural condition of human life" independently of every ideological superstructure.

Still, Plato writes in *Symposium* (205b): "All creation or passage of non-being into being is poetry or making [*poiēsis*], and the processes of all art are creative; and the masters of arts are all poets or makers."

Since Plato, a *thing* is that which maintains itself in a provisional equilibrium between *being* and *non-being*.

The latter two expressions already existed in Homer's language. But it is *only* with the appearance of philosophy that 'non-being' is thought of as negation of the *whole* and that the whole is thought of as 'being', that is, as being what has *nothing* outside of itself.

Since Plato, a thing is that about which is said: *it is but it was not and will not be*. That is, a thing was nothing and will return to be nothing.

When the fish is in water, the union of the fish with the fire cooking it is still nothing (although the union of the fish with water exists and the fire may be already lit). And when the fish is placed on the fire, its union with water has become nothing (although the union of the fish with fire exists and the water still continues to flow).

Only with Greek thought is this network of relations brought into language, uniting *being* and *non-being* in a determinate way with colours, sounds, and qualities of the earth, and obtaining from this union what peoples of the West mean by 'thing'.

But it is precisely because the 'thing' is thought as a provisional equilibrium between being and non-being that the project to dominate it, by producing and destroying the thing, acquires a radicality it never possessed before. In fact, 'to produce' now means 'to make pass from nothingness into being'; 'to destroy' now means 'to make pass from being into nothingness'. And it is exactly according to these meanings that life is constituted.

Western civilisation looks at the sense of the 'thing' with the eyes of the Greeks, but believes to have before itself something 'natural' in the same way as capitalism believes that capitalist relations of production are 'natural', and not the result of historical occurrence.

Precisely because Marx understands the 'general nature' of labour as independent of every ideological-cultural superstructure, he shows he has no doubts on the meaning of the word 'thing'. (This confidence of his is shared by all Western thinkers—even by those who, like Heidegger, call into question what the 'thing' means.)

Labour constitutes itself, in fact, as a relation with things, so that what the thingness means (the separability of the thing from its originary ties with the land) also presents itself in Marx's discourse, in terms of "the eternal natural condition of human life".

Marx doesn't even suspect this meaning may have only appeared at a certain moment in the historical occurrence of the world.

But things, which labour has to deal with, appear as "things" *not only* to the thinker who reflects on the essence of labour: they appear as 'things' *also* to the worker.

When the woodcutter works, it is because he has to deal with trees, and not with fish, that he performs certain actions and not others.

It is the sense the tree has for him which establishes and determines the actions he performs when he cuts it. And only those. And it is the sense the fish has for him which establishes and determines the actions he performs when he catches it. And only those.

So then, the tree appears to the woodcutter as *different* from the fish, the torrent, the path to home. But the tree, the fish, the torrent, the path, the home appear to him, each of them, as *one of*

the things he has to deal with. Each one appears in its own *non-being to others*; but precisely for this reason, each one appears to the woodcutter as a *that*, as a *thing*.

Each one, take for example the tree, does not simply appear to the woodcutter as a *tree* but also as *a thing*. The tree shows to the woodcutter its own sense (that is, its *being-tree*) in the same way as the thing shows its own sense, that is, its *thingness* (the thingness that is a tree).

And in the woodcutter's world each thing is, precisely, a thing. Even in Italian, the word *cosa* ["thing"] retains such extremely wide meaning, which grants calling 'things' even human beings, and God too.

But precisely because in the woodcutter's world all things appear as 'things', it follows that it is the sense he confers to the thingness which then establishes, and determines, *all* the actions he can perform during his life.

Not only that, but it actually also establishes and determines all actions and work of a people; insofar as the sense the thingness has, for such people, is the same sense the thing has when it is showing itself to the woodcutter.

If the appearance of the tree, the fish, or the path in fact determines certain actions performed on them time after time; then the sense of the thingness, present in each of them, establishes and determines not just this or that labour, this or that way of life, but *all* labour, *all* 'life' that looks at this sense.

The entire operation of a historical epoch is established by the sense that, according to such epoch, the thingness is seen to have on the part of things.

The sense given to the 'thing' is in fact not constant.

We believe it is constant because a single sense of the thing now already manages to dominate peoples on earth: *the Greek sense of the thing*.

The *Republic* is not merely a great dialogue in which Plato contemplated the utopia of a State governed by philosophers: Western civilisation—the gigantic vicissitude of facts and events constituting the civilisation today dominant on earth—is the Republic founded by Plato. He is the sower of the West.

Nothing has ever appeared that, in the same way as Plato's *Republic*—*Res publica*, 'public thing'—has managed to be so far removed from utopia, and to be still so present and dominant in human life. This is so precisely because the sense that Greek thought attributed to the thingness is the space within which, little by little, the actions and works of all peoples now operate.

The civilisation of technics is the way in which the Greek sense of the thing dominates today.

It is labour itself here, the labour of peoples, that does not limit itself to be looked at by the eyes of the Greeks, but is looking with these eyes and seeing everywhere the Greek sense of the thing.

To ask what *the truth* of this sense is, then: is it not to ask what the truth of our own civilisation is? The 'demon' of the West is the Greek sense of the thing. What for inhabitants of the West is supreme evidence—the emergence of things and their return to nothingness, on the part of things—is the argument of extreme folly. But our civilisation ignores the authentic sense of folly.

3.
DEATH OF PHILOSOPHY

What is philosophy?

Answers are so numerous and disparate that the desire to know passes away.

Still, there is a privileged point of observation.

If we lie in wait, we hear right away a great bark and, immediately, we see a great pack of dogs all running in the same direction. Some of them are strong and well-built; others are frail, and others still are squinted and crippled.

Perhaps many need reminding, but it's clear they are all following the same wounded beast.

Never as much as in our own culture, has so much been written, with so much obstinacy, against 'the definitive and incontrovertible truth.' Works by thinkers, scientists, men of faith and action, artists, historians, politicians. A large pack that is not chasing a specter but a beast, born in Greece before Christ, whom until yesterday was the queen of the forest.

This is what, in fact, philosophy has been first and foremost from Plato to Hegel: the attempt to discover the absolute truth, the unmodifiable and incontrovertible truth; that which is the way it is, neither because one has faith or certainty of it, nor because one wishes, hopes or fears that it is the way it is, but because it is *impossible* that it would be any different from the way it is; and thus, that truth which is impossible to negate in whichever way, by whomever (human or godly), for whatever reason, in whichever time, for whatever objective. This is what 'truth' means for philosophy. Such an attempt, proper to philosophy, does not find terms of comparison in any other moment of human history.

The beast, it has been said, is wounded. Or rather, it is mortally wounded.

The dogs, while running, tell each other: "I was the one who wounded her!" "No, it was me!" "It was all of us put together!"

And instead, none of them has brought her to death.

Not modern science, nor bourgeois society, nor Christianity. These have only shown themselves capable of living without philosophy and have shown that philosophy, rather, is a hindrance to their ways of conceiving life.

When an incontrovertible truth is rejected, the rejection cannot be an incontrovertible truth: it is only the practical capacity to organise existence without such truth.

Dogs smell the blood, and know how to follow it; but in spite of the pride they boast, they do not understand their teeth have never really been a danger to the beast.

She has been mortally wounded since her very birth.

She has herself, ever since then, inflicted this wound.

Why do we say this?

Since the beginning, philosophy has wished to know the truth *about the world*.

Certainly, the world was already known prior to philosophy, but she confers to it a sense until then unheard of. For the first time, in fact, she expresses the extreme counterposition, the one between *being* and *nothingness*, and conceives the world as the place in which things come from nothingness, reach the shore of being and then return to the abyss of nothingness.

Even here: the words 'being' and 'nothingness' already existed in Greek language, prior to philosophy. And even in the most ancient tongues of the East. But their sense is wound up in shadows, in ambiguity.

In the fourth hymn of the *Rigveda*—a text of the most ancient Aryan peoples in India, dating back prior to 1000 AD—we read: "Back then there was no non-being, there was no being. Back then there was neither death, nor immortality. Without producing wind that One breathed by its own force; besides it, there was nothing else."

In the same way that, here, 'being' has an uncertain, narrow, undulating meaning—it does not indicate that *every* thing differentiates itself from nothingness—it is also true that "back then," when "there was no being", *there was* however the "One" (the 'vital principle') that "breathed by its own force." And this force of the One *is not a nothing*.

That 'being' which is still missing, when only the 'One' exists, therefore only means living, growing and dwelling, as it is observed by scientific analysis of the Aryan ancient language.

But precisely because philosophy expresses the extreme counterposition between being and nothingness, and understands the world as the place in which things are contended; precisely for this reason, the tragic sense of existence reaches its acme.

Nietzsche certainly posed himself the problem of the relationship between the Greek language and pain, and how this relationship is historically transformed. But he too remained substantially insensitive to the singular circumstance through which Greek philosophy (as the expression of the sense of being and nothingness) and great tragic poetry were born together.

Philosophy opens up the space in which tragedy moves.

When Nietzsche states that "all becoming involves pain", he only means that 'in order for' a creator becoming to exist there must exist pain ("the agony of the woman giving birth"): he does not understand that the pain seen by Aeschylus and Sophocles is not the condition, but the consequence of the gaze—with which, already at the beginning, philosophy sees becoming as an emergence from the abyss of nothingness and a return back into it.

It is, in fact, the very emergence of things from nothingness that makes events totally unpredictable, and extremely violent and terrifying their collision with what already exists. Generated from nothingness, things present themselves dissolved from any pact with the order of existence and, thus, they are an extreme menace to this order. Chance, lot, *autòmaton*.

But as will to discover the truth of the world, the truth of becoming, where being and nothingness contend things between each other, philosophy is also a defence from the menace she herself elicited by evoking that contention.

And between defence and menace, a mortal struggle begins right away.

Truth is in fact like a king, to whose laws are submitted not

only the living but also the yet unborn. Laws reach those still unborn and tell them: "You already walk on our road, to us you are already subjected. Because upon you, we impose this already, so that when your turn to be born will come, you will have to subject yourselves to us."

Laws unseal the ears of the still unborn and make themselves heard. And the unborn stay there listening to them. That is, they behave as if they were already born.

When they will be born, their birth will thus only be an appearance, a fiction. Laws render their birth impossible.

In the same way, the absolute and incontrovertible truth remains at the centre of the universe and imposes itself on everything. Nothing can escape its law, not even things that are yet to come from nothingness. She reaches them, too, and speaks to them like the laws of that king speak to the still unborn. Removing the seals of nothingness from the ears of what is still a nothing, truth speaks thus: "Even you, borderless extension of what is still yet nothing, you are already in my dominion, in spite of your not yet existing. Because when you will come from nothingness, you will not be able to go wherever you want, but you will have to submit to the laws of my reign, which govern everything, and which no one can escape."

Even prior to emerging from nothingness, what is still nothing hears the appeal of truth. The appeal passes through it, fills its empty veins, constitutes and consecrates it as subject to truth.

Listener and subject to the truth, nothingness behaves like an essent.

The voice of truth is so strong that it does not grant what is still nothing to sleep. This voice does not grant it to remain nothing.

When the things that truth does not allow to sleep in nothingness will come from nothingness, they will only pretend to be waking up. They had always already been awake. Their emergence from nothingness, that is, their becoming, will thus be a fiction and an appearance. They had never been anything.

Truth betrays the nothingness from which things of the world emerge in becoming: it wished to be the truth of the becoming

of the world, and instead betrays becoming and renders it impossible. Truth wished to be the womb that preserves the eggs of becoming, and instead the womb crushes the eggs.

Or it would crush them, if they were not resisting every attempt at seizure.

The will for becoming to be, the will not to betray becoming, reveals itself as unshakeable.

And the absolute truth itself, wishing to be the master of becoming, recognises the existence of becoming. Absolute truth recognises the irrepressibility of becoming precisely because of its intention to dominate it.

The will for the world to be in becoming is the fundamental trait that the beast and the dogs chasing it *have in common*.

The whole of Western civilisation grows together with the obstinacy of this will. According to it, becoming is the supreme 'evidence'; that which cannot be betrayed and suffocated.

But truth betrays and suffocates becoming.

Thus, *it is necessary*, in order for becoming to be, that the truth be dead—and be dead the entire traditional civilisation of the West, which is founded upon the truth of philosophy. The eggs of becoming are those of a snake, and the snakes of becoming bite the womb that hatches them to death. *They* produce the mortal wound; not the dogs sniffing it.

Philosophy is the beast that since birth inflicts on herself a mortal wound, precisely because it wishes to be the absolute truth of the becoming of the world. That is, the struggle between two mortal enemies is within herself.

The ancient word with which philosophy expresses the absolute character of truth is *epistéme*. Literally, it means the *staying* (*stéme*) that imposes itself *on* (*epí*) everything, and primarily on the menacing restlessness of becoming. The word *epistéme* expresses the will to dominion that belongs to philosophy. For this reason, the image of the beast is not just an artifice.

Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods and taught human beings the arts, is terrifying because he impersonates the menace to the order of existence, he incarnates the unpredictability of becoming. Above all, it befits him that the Chorus, in Sophocles'

Antigone, in the first canto around the altar, says of man: many are the things that are terrible and disturbing, but none of them more so than man. No one is more unpredictable than him, within whom becoming has its acme. No one draws the invention of the world from nothingness more than him.

The *epistéme*, which defends from the menace of the unpredictable, corresponds to the image of a 'Prometheus bound', evoked by Aeschylus. The chain and the eagle that gnaws his liver *stay on* him, dominating him.

But they do not succeed in killing him.

On the contrary, what is already foretold is the liberation and catastrophe of the gods. That is, the catastrophe of the *epistéme* and of truth. And the birth of a new human being who turns their back on the old terror of becoming.

In the preface to his first book, Nietzsche speaks of a 'Prometheus liberated'. But it is not Nietzsche who liberates him. Nor even contemporary civilisation, in its refusal of every absolute truth. This civilisation is the pack of dogs that have sniffed the blood of philosophy.

Instead, it is precisely because Prometheus, in spite of torture, *survives*, that the chains and Zeus' eagle are *destined* to dissolve themselves: precisely because *the will* for becoming *to be* wants it to be the supreme and ineradicable 'evidence' surviving any attempt to suffocate it; precisely for this reason, it is *necessary* for any absolute truth, within which the becoming of the world is unthinkable, to vanish. (A necessity—this one, which *destines* Zeus to his sunset—which does not identify itself in any of the critiques that Western civilisation has directed towards philosophy; that is, with any of the wounds that the pack of dogs believes to have inflicted on the beast.)

This will is the wound which, since the beginning, destines philosophy to death.

But what would happen if the becoming of the world—the emergence from and return to nothingness—were to appear exactly as something *willed*, that is, not as supreme evidence, but as the *will* for it to be supreme 'evidence'?

And what would happen if this will were to appear as extreme

folly, that folly which our civilisation considers as the supreme 'evidence'?

Would it not be necessary to say, first and foremost, that the truth destined to death is the truth that philosophy has tied to extreme folly since its very outset?

And that instead, *untied from folly*, immune to the mortal wound, the *truth*—the *destiny* which neither human beings nor gods can budge—waits to be witnessed, along a path *which is still entirely to be passed through*?

If Prometheus is extreme folly, his sunset does not imply that, therefore, it is for his chains and Zeus' eagle that a path still entirely to be travelled is opened. *They too* set with Prometheus. They partake in his folly. They recognise his existence.

The *destiny of truth*, in fact, is not a master who stays *on* Prometheus' becoming, dominating him (and thus recognising his existence). If the dominated do not exist—if they exist only in the dreams of folly—not even masters exist. The destiny of truth *stays*; no longer "on" things, but rather within their heart. Beyond Prometheus *and* Zeus' eagle.

4.
FOLLY (I)

Extreme folly is the persuasion that things—that is, entities, non-nothings—are nothing. This is also the most direct and fundamental definition of the word 'nihilism'.

Extreme folly is not only a 'thought' but it is altogether an acting, a living; to live things as if they were a nothing, to act in compliance with the persuasion that non-nothingness is nothing.

And life and action, as such, cannot be anything other than this: they cannot be anything other than treating things as nothing. Life and action are erroneous because they are faith; but faith is the erring that brings itself far away from destiny, that is, from the place where things *stay* in their impossibility to be identified with nothingness.

Destiny *stays*, in the sense that it is the only thing which cannot be shrouded by the shadow of the "No", as well as in the sense that, within it, all things stay; that is, it rejects the persuasion, the will for the being of a thing to signify being nothingness. And thus they stay, *eternal*. All.

Heidegger notes that Nietzsche has grasped beyond doubt certain traits of nihilism, but has grasped them within a point of view that continues to remain nihilistic. The language that witnesses destiny says that Heidegger, undoubtedly, has grasped certain traits of nihilism, but in his turn has also grasped them within a perspective that continues to be nihilistic.

Heidegger could speak about Nietzsche in that way because, in the meantime, he had altered the concept of nihilism. To refer what Heidegger says about Nietzsche, then, demands an analogous transformation of such concept.

The authentic meaning of nihilism has still not been grasped

by 'our culture', that is, by Western culture inasmuch as it is now becoming planetary culture.

The world 'nihilism' includes the Latin word *nihil*, signifying 'nothing'; and the signified 'nothing' [*niente*] is essentially in relation to the signified 'entity' [*ente*]: 'nothing' means 'nothing', 'no-entity' [*ni-ente*]. That is, it is impossible to confront (from any point of view) the problem of what nihilism means without understanding the meaning of the structure constituting the categories 'entity' and 'nothing' (and the categories connected to them), emerging, once and for all, with Greek thought. And which continues to remain, even if implicitly, at the basis of every cultural and practical form of Western civilisation; even of those forms seemingly furthest away from Greek thought—like, for example, contemporary science.

'Entity' and 'nothing', constituents to the meaning of the word 'nihilism', are not innocent terms. 'Entity' ('essent') means 'that which is'. *That which is* is that *something* about which it is stated that it *is*—and, therefore, that it 'was' and 'will be'. When it is, the entity is not nothing; it is not that extreme distance from the entity, that only Greek thought had begun to think of it as. It is impossible to speak of nihilism, without referring to this extreme distance between the entity and nothingness, which implicitly upholds not only every discourse, but also every praxis of Western civilisation.

There is no end to the discussion, for instance, about the necessity to safeguard the 'historical novelty'. Among the defenders of the historical novelty, there is without doubt Heidegger. But, even before him, Lukács supported with absolute clarity the claim that the historical novelty should not be locked inside a grid that renders it impossible.

But the word 'novelty' loses all of its radicality—the radicality *forcing* us to rule out that history is locked inside immutable grids and structures—if we do not think about it in relation to *nothingness*, understood as the *absolutely* other to the entity; that is, understood as that *nihil absolutum* which is necessary for the novelty to pose itself as new.

The new is truly new only if, before appearing, it is not

bound to conceal itself but is nothing. To the extent that it is hidden, latent, implicit, the new already makes itself heard in some way; it transpires, pre-announces itself and, thus, its explicit appearance is not an authentic novelty. New is only that which comes from nothingness. The concept of 'historical novelty' loses any force if it is treated with that level of semantic-conceptual superficiality at which, for instance, historical disciplines keep it.

But so do all the other disciplines. For instance, the biological ones. In a book like Monod's *Chance and Necessity*, the word 'novelty' appears innumerable times. It indicates the condition that makes the biological event subject to chance, with respect to the structures tending to anticipate it.

But even in this context, the word 'novelty' is unable to express what still it tends to express: the radical unpredictability of chance. Chance is an unpredictable novelty only if what is casual has been a nothing; which, as a nothing, could not have been tied to the already existent by any law.

The new can certainly be prepared by a series of circumstances and conditions: our civilisation is certainly prepared by our historical past. But insofar as our civilisation is a novelty with respect to its past, what is new within it must have been nothing before.

These examples (and we could adduce infinite others—just think, for example, of the way in which quantum physics studies the new, casual event) point out how 'our culture'—which tends towards the (certainly inevitable) destruction of philosophy and of every definitive and incontrovertible truth—can confer density of meaning and force befitting to such destruction only inasmuch as it would consciously recover and conserve within itself that soul of the Greek past, of whose forms such culture is the destruction. That soul which is constituted by play of the thing between being and nothingness.

Today, instead, the dominant scientifical-technological attitude does not manage to elude foolishness, because it believes itself to be really far apart from those Greek categories—precisely, from the play between 'entity' and 'nothingness'—that instead continue to essentially determine it.

Today, even science belongs to the pack of dogs chasing the beast, dying for a wound none of them inflicted on her.

Nihilism means to think, take on and live as nothing that which is *not* nothing. Any other definition of nihilism (and European culture is undoubtedly rich in them) must inevitably deal with this central and elementary meaning of the term.

If we keep hold of this basic acceptation to the word 'nihilism', then *no* form of Western culture (not even Nietzsche) is willing to recognise itself as nihilist. And it is even less willing to weave an apologia for nihilism (this has been Nietzsche's temptation); that is, for the attitude that lives, thinks, takes on as nothing the entities (the things, the concrete determinations surrounding us: the non-nothings) insofar and to extent that they are entities.

Still, the refusal of nihilism is the mask of the *essential persuasion* of the West: that the *entity, as entity, is nothing*. Jacobi was one of the first to use to the term nihilism: referring both to Kant and to idealism. Let's dwell upon this second reference.

For Jacobi idealism is nihilism, because it negates reality conceived as a dimension independent of the consciousness thinking it. That is, idealism makes into nothing that reality independent of human thought, whose existence is instead—in the eyes of the realist Jacobi—undeniable.

Here, on Jacobi's part, what is proposed is a rigorous usage of the term 'nihilism'. More properly put: a rigorous usage *of the elementary acceptation* of that term. In this acceptation, nihilism certainly means *making into nothing* (to consider and live as nothing) what is regarded by non-nihilism as, on the basis of certain reasonings, non-nothing. (For Jacobi, things exist even if such consciousness or subjectivity does not exist, which for idealism is instead the production of the existence of things—and which, therefore, insofar as they are independent of consciousness, idealism posits them as nothings). Still, it should be noted, this *making into nothing* makes into nothing *not* something whose existence is also recognised, but rather, something we are convinced does not have any qualification to exist. In the eyes of idealism, a reality independent of thought is like a squared circle; and thus idealism, saying about such reality that it is nothing, says, properly speaking, that nothingness is nothing. (This is so independently of there being value in the idealistic thesis, or lack thereof.) Gaining consciousness of itself, idealism does not see itself as an operation identifying the *entity* with nothingness, but as an operation positing as nothing what for idealism cannot possibly exist. Idealism is nihilism only in the eyes of whoever believes we cannot prescind from that existence.

So, the authentic meaning of nihilism is not reducible to this elementary acceptation of nihilism, where—we repeat—'nihilism' (that is, what in the eyes of a certain conception appears as 'nihilism') asserts the nothingness of something that is *not* recognised (on the part of who asserts this nothingness) as worthy of deserving the qualification of existent.

The 'essence of nihilism' is instead something different and more complex: in the essence of nihilism is asserted—but implicitly, in the unconscious of the word—*the being-nothing of that which is furthermore—explicitly—recognised as entity, that is, as a non-nothing*. Here, if nihilism were to become transparent to itself, it would see itself as operating an identification with nothingness, and with the entity insofar as it is an entity.

If we asked anyone whatsoever whether the things that shape the universe in this moment are entities or they are nothing, everyone would certainly answer (and naturally also Heidegger, Hegel, and all inhabitants of the West, ever since Plato, answer in this way) that things are undoubtedly entities, that is, non-nothings.

So then, it is precisely in the way that Western culture explicitly asserts that things are *entities* that the implicit, unconscious claim that things are *nothing* is concealed.

This is *the trait* that my writings have primarily concerned themselves to found—shedding light, first and foremost, on the authentic sense of 'founding'—and this is the foundation on which, on the contrary, critics of my writings have rarely dwelt.

And yet this *trait* is decisive, because its 'consequences', if they derive from it *by necessity*, *must* be accepted, however paradoxical they may seem. We cannot marvel at 'consequences': we must instead question the 'premises' from which those 'consequences' derive, with necessity (and it is clear that the

authentic sense of 'Necessity' is proper to the authentic sense of 'foundation' on which such trait is based).

That evangelical saying, according to which the tree recognises itself by its fruits, should be read in inverse terms: judgement on the goodness of fruits must be given by looking at the roots of the tree. If they are well rooted in the ground, then it is necessary for fruits to taste good; and therefore no one can say that the tree is bad because its fruits taste foul, but only that it is the one who is tasting them that has bad taste. It is to those roots, to that rooting in the ground, that every discussion ought to be led back.

5.
FOLLY (II) AND HEALTH

It will only be possible here to refer more generally to some of salient features of this decisive trait; its structure has a complexity that cannot be placed under the reader's eyes in these pages.

If we were to ask someone what they think of the following proposition: "When the circle was (or will be) square, such or such other phenomena occurred (or will occur)"; anyone would respond that they are not interested to know which phenomena it concerns, since there can never be a time in which a circle was (or will be) square.

Certainly, they will respond something of the sort with respect to the proposition: "When the sun was (or will be) the moon, *etc*."

Even in this case, that is, they will say that there cannot be a time in which the sun has been (or will be) the moon. And a similar answer would also be given in all the other similar cases. Here, our sensibility towards the unthinkable and the absurd is awake; that is, it immediately notices *the contradiction* inherent in thinking of a time in which a square has been, or will be, a circle, or in thinking of a time in which the sun has been, or will be, the moon.

But this sensibility, this immediate capacity to perceive the presence of the absurd, is lacking from us—and this 'from us' refers to 'us' inasmuch as we are inhabitants of the West—*in relation to this other proposition*: "*When this day of ours did not exist yet, etc.*"; or to this one: "*When whatever entity was not, or will not be, etc.*"

Not only do we feel here completely at ease, but we may even regard the potential to speak in this way to be one of the essential conditions for our 'beatitude'. In *The Man without Qualities*, Musil speaks precisely of 'beatitude' as being proper

to whoever can say 'when', 'before that', 'after that'; that is, as Heidegger will then say, proper to whoever understands being as that which essentially belongs to the 'not-being-yet' and the 'not-being-any-longer'.

It is a beatitude, however, whose borders with desperation are uncertain and provisional. Brecht 'sees' 'no hope' related to the 'when' (*Poems*, Methuen: London, 1976, *Born Later*):

> *Ich gestehe es: ich*
> *Habe keine Hoffnung.*
> *Die Blinden reden von einem Ausweg. Ich*
> *Sehe.*
> *Wenn die Irrtümer verbraucht sind*
> *Sitzt als letzter Gesellschafter*
> *Uns das Nichts gegenüber.*
> [I admit it: I
> Have no hope.
> The blind talk of a way out. I
> See.
> When the errors have been used up
> As our last companion, facing us
> Sits nothingness.]

"When the errors have been used up"; even the 'errant shepherd' "*Cade, risorge, e più e più s'affretta, / Senza posa o ristoro*" ["Falls, rises, and runs faster and faster, / Without rest or pause"]:

> *... infin ch'arriva*
> *Colà dove la via*
> *E dove il tanto affaticar fu vòlto*
> *Abisso orrido, immenso,*
> *Ov'ei precipitando, il tutto oblia.*
> [... till he arrives
> There where the path
> And where so much toil was headed,
> A horrid, immense abyss into which
> He plunges, and thus forgets everything.]
> [Leopardi, *Canti*]

Now, it's already out of the question that for 'us all' reality is historical: there are no longer gods, no longer immutables, or if we still do not reject them, they are the mystery lurking beyond the evidence of the historical reality.

All things thus have the character Plato noted, apropos of that section of reality which is the 'intermediary' between the absolutely essent and the absolutely nothing: all things are a partaking both in being and nothingness, an *oscillating* between nothingness and being. (The Heideggerian term naming the entity's oscillation—*Schwanken*—is explicitly Platonic.)

All things are *oscillating*. They are born, that is, they come from nothingness (although only *to a certain extent*, and not completely—to the extent, for example, that is specified by the Aristotelian theory of becoming, which establishes how much of what is born pre-exists it, and how much of what dies lingers on) and they return to nothingness. "Till he arrives there", into the "abyss" of nothingness.

All of Western culture, and by now also the very same idea of Western 'common sense', is a gigantic variation of what the Greeks meant by the thing; that is, the oscillation leading the thing from nothingness into being.

Through the voice of Hyperion, Hölderlin asks: "Why do you lay the axe to my root, pitiless spirit?" The axe is the thought which makes us "aware that we are born for nothing, that we love a nothing, believe in nothing, work ourselves to death for nothing only that little by little we may pass over into nothing."

In the mouth of the captain of industry Felix Krull, Thomas Mann put these words:

> This interdependent whirling and circling, this convolution of gases into heavenly bodies, this burning, flaming, freezing, exploding, pulverizing, this plunging and speeding, bred out of Nothingness and awaking Nothingness—which would perhaps have preferred to remain asleep and was waiting to fall asleep again...

These words echo Calderón de la Barca's line "*Pues el delito mayor / del hombre es haber nacido*" ["Since man's greatest

crime on earth / Is the fatal fact of birth"], as well as those that Nietzsche reminds us, from even farther away, uttered by the wise Silenus, who responds to Midas' request to tell him what is most desirable to man by saying:

> Miserable, ephemeral race, children of hazard and hardship, why do you force me to say what it would be much more fruitful for you not to hear? The best of all things is something entirely outside your grasp: not to be born, not to be, to be nothing. But the second best thing for you—is to die soon.

These are the voices of nihilism. *But they do not openly say what resounds in their depths—even more peremptory than Silenus' response*. They do not bring to the surface their deepest conviction: that *things* (entities) *are nothing*.

They only bring to the surface the historical character of things: a thing (such as, reality) is a being necessarily compromised with being and non-being; it is a dispute between these two, where the thing does not let itself be definitively captured neither by being nor by non-being, and thus, precisely, oscillates between one and the other.

In the ending of Book V of *The Republic*, Plato says that a thing is an *epamphoterìzein*. This word means: 'to be uncertain', 'to waver between two parties or opinions'.

It is in fact a composite word, deriving from the expression *epì (ta) amphòtera erìzein*: 'to waver (*erìzein*) between (*epì*) the one and the other (*amphòtera*)', and thus 'to be contended (*erìzein* is a verb constructed on the noun *éris*, "struggle", "war") by one and the other'.

The two, between whom the thing is uncertain and by whom it is contended, are specifically being and nothingness. The *epamphoterìzein* is precisely the *oscillating* of the thing between being and nothingness; the *dispute* between the two who contend it, where the thing does not let itself be definitively captured neither by the one nor by the other, and thus, precisely, oscillates between the one and the other.

This 'play' between being and nothingness (the 'play' of the

'event', that Heidegger speaks of, is nothing different from the *epamphoterìzein* of the thing, bringing things out of nothingness into being and carrying them back into nothingness) thus implies, inevitably, the possibility to speak of a time in which things will no longer be, and of a time in which things still were not. That is, a time in which it could be said: "When things (that now are) were not"; or a time in which it could be said: "When things (that now are) will no longer be."

What we are saying, however, is that such sensibility for the absurd, which we have when we *rule out* the possibility of accepting the expression "when the circle is square" (or "when the sun is the moon"), is the same sensibility which makes us say that there can never be a time when the circle is square and the sun is moon. Such sensibility *is lacking from us*—lacking from us insofar as inhabitants of the West—when we are blessed-despaired by the beatitude-desperation of Musil and Brecht. That is, when we say: "When a thing was (or will be) nothing"; "Before that it was"; "When it will no longer be"; "When I—each of us can say it—was (and will be) nothing."

Each of us, a few decades ago, was not, *that is, was a nothing*. The biological conditions that prepared our existence may have been present; in the mind of God, there may have already been our souls. But *this unrepeatability*, *this specificity* constituting each of us insofar as we are presently existent, this specificity and unrepeatability, only a few decades ago, was a nothing.

Because if *even* this specificity and unrepeatability had already been present, then each of us would have already been present. Each of us would have already existed prior to being born: we would have already existed in the specificity presently constituting us.

Each one of us is born, precisely because within us there is something that used to be nothing. Only if something within us has been a nothing, it can be said that we are born. Only if something of all that which is born (produced, created, generated, fabricated) has been a nothing, it can be said about that which is born that it is born.

Thus, when we say "we will die" we mean to say: many

things about us will certainly remain but something certainly will not remain, something certainly *will become nothing*. Only if something of that which dies becomes nothing, it is possible to affirm that something dies (is destroyed, corrupts itself, undoes itself, consumes itself).

It is in this sense that we say: "When something was nothing"; or we say: "When something will be nothing." Thus speak inhabitants of the West.

But, furthermore, 'we' do not intend to absolutely relinquish the difference between the expression: "When I was (or will be) nothing"; and the expression: "When nothingness was (or will be) nothingness."

That *I*—and *you* and *animals* and *plants* and *stars* and *thoughts* and *feelings* and *the earth*—have been and return to be nothing *does not mean* that *nothingness* has been and returns to be nothing.

It is not *about nothingness*, but *about something*, that is, *about non-nothing*, that we say that it has been and will return to be nothing.

Nothingness is nothing: about it, it is impossible to say that it is *still* nothing and that it *will return* to be nothing.

There is an irrepressible difference between saying: "When *nothingness* was (or will be) nothing"; and saying: "When *a thing* was (or will be) nothing."

But 'thing' precisely means 'non-nothing': a thing is a non-nothing. Concerning the indefinite pronoun *ti*, which in the Greek language corresponds to the Latin *aliquid* and specifically indicates the *thing*, Plato says in the *Sophist*: "*ti* always refers to what is." From Plato onwards, we cannot speak of a 'thing' only if it is not in relation to its *non*-being-nothing. Things are *non*-nothings.

And thus we have reached the core: *to think of a time in which things are not, means to think of a time in which non-nothingness is nothing*.

That is, it means to think of the time of the absolutely absurd, of what cannot absolutely exist, of what cannot cannot find any place in existence—if the Greek word *átopon*, 'absurd', literally means 'without place'.

In the same way as the statement of a time, in which the circle is square or the sun is moon, *includes the statement that the circle is square* and that the sun is moon, the statement of a time in which non-nothingness is nothing *includes the statement that non-nothingness is nothing*.

But there exists no time other than the one in which things (non-nothings) were still nothing, before being, and will return to be nothing, after having been. Thus to state that things are within time, becoming history, process, *that is, an emergence from and a return to nothingness*, means to state that things are nothing: that they were nothing when they had not yet come from nothingness and that they will be nothing when they will have returned back into it.

The explicit words of the West say: "Things come from and return to nothingness. But *when they are* (when they stay in the balance of being), they are *not* a nothing: they are *essents*."

But the deepest unconscious of these words says: "Things are nothing."

The extreme folly of the West conceals itself under the terrible voice of the wise Silesius. The refusal of nihilism, on the part of the West, is the mask of the essential Persuasion of the West: that the *entity insofar as entity is nothing*. ("Poetry, which is memory," writes Claudio Magris, "lives beyond the contradiction denounced by Severino, beyond nihilism." But, I answer, 'memory' does not impede 'the mortal' from being 'extinguished': Foscolo's *Sepulchres* were published in the same year as Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where it is said that memory conserves the 'essence', not the 'existence'. Poetry's victory over nothingness is, to be precise, 'illusion'.)

Outside of folly, what opens itself always already is destiny; the *staying* of things; the impossibility of their non-being; that is, their being, all of them, *eternal*.

If *folly* is to think that things come from nothingness and return to it—and living and acting in compliance with such persuasion—then non-folly, the *health* that opens itself up always already beyond the borders of folly, is the gaze of destiny seeing the eternity *of every thing*; and, thus, seeing the alienation

of every action and every will to power planning the dominion, transformation, creation, and destruction of the eternal.

Only the Necessity of destiny is not will to power. The negation of Necessity is in fact (but here reference to my other writings is inevitable) a "No" directing against itself an arrow which, wishing to hit the target of Necessity, hits instead with Necessity only itself.

It is Necessity that the negation of Necessity is self-negation. (It is Necessity that the will-for-the-entity-to-be-nothing is a negation of itself.) Only this negation is self-negation.

Thus, only Necessity is not will to power. By self-negating itself, the negation of Necessity leaves Necessity at the heart of every thing, where it does not find any resistance on which to impose itself: Necessity is the heart of every thing.

Today 'our culture' has liberated itself from the burden of every 'necessity' (immutable structures and relations, definitive and irrefutable truths, absolutes and gods). And, certainly, it is Necessity that the West would destroy every 'necessity' evoked by it. It is Necessity that Prometheus would liberate himself from his chains and Zeus' eagle.

But the 'necessities' of the West are necessities which grow out the conviction that things are nothing. Zeus believes that Prometheus exists, and thus believes in the extreme folly that Prometheus consists in.

They are the 'necessity' of nihilism. They stay in the extreme distance with respect to the authentic sense of Necessity. In the *necessary* implication between the claim of an historicity within the world and the assertion of the nothingness of things, Necessity appears in its proper sense, inasmuch as it opens itself up always already outside of the history of nihilism.

The 'necessities' of nihilism are *masters* exerting their power on *slaves*. Slaves are the various ways in which things present themselves, in whose historicity (in whose *epamphoterìzein*) one holds faith. 'History is made by slaves,' in the sense that it is inevitable—for an inevitability that slaves themselves ignore—that slaves would liberate themselves from masters.

But outside of the alienation of nihilism, *Necessity* is not a

master, because it is the appearance of the impossibility of every slave's existence, and thus every master's existence, too. That is, it is the appearance of the Necessity that *every thing* should sit near its own "is", unwilling to become prey to the 'demon' wishing to separate Necessity from it, unwilling to become prey to the forces proposing themselves to drag Necessity out of nothingness, and back into it.

As preys, things *only* become so within the *dream* which that project consists in. Within the dream dreaming the impossible—within the attempt attempting the impossible.

6.
TWO SOULS INHABIT OUR CHEST

We are Joy. This word does not indicate a psychological feeling: it indicates the rejoicing of the Whole for its being Whole. Fulfillment of every need, liberation from every pain, filling up of every lacuna.

But we are also the faith of being surrounded and penetrated by pain, death, nothingness. And we are hasty to keep at a distance, from the seriousness of our existence, the fable according to which we are the rejoicing of the Whole.

We are Joy and, together, faith of being something else altogether. Two souls inhabit our chest; one that is hidden, and the other manifest.

The Whole rejoices because its completeness is not perishable, but eternal. This eternity is the foundation of Joy. But all is eternal. *All*, in the most intense and richest of senses: each of the things and each form, appearance, state, gesture, shadow, mention, startle, relation of theirs. Each of the things and their staying all together gathered within the Whole.

Eternal does not mean 'immortal'.

According to Christianity, for example, the human soul is immortal but not eternal: 'God' creates it out of nothingness and, if he wished it, could force it once more back into nothingness.

That each of the things is eternal means that each—even the most humble and irrelevant one—can never be a nothing: it is necessity that it would stay tied to its being. This bond does not coerce each of the things: it satisfies their heart.

We turn back some millennia and things—for instance, voices coming up from the street—have always already been there, together with the rain that surrounds them this evening and the

lamp suffusing the room with light. We move onwards for millennia, and they are there forever, just as they now appear, in their entirety.

No thing, therefore, is a 'creature', and none is a 'creator'. None of them needs a 'God', 'father', 'lord', 'master', 'maker', or 'producer' to guarantee its permanence in being and keep afar the menace of nothingness.

Even the 'God' of Christianity and that of philosophers is 'eternal', since it does not come from nothingness and does not return to it.

But it is an 'eternal' containing within itself the possibility that the world may be nothing. In the mind of 'God' the world appears as that which could have remained nothing and which 'God' could hunt back into nothingness. The 'eternal God' contains within itself the possibility that the world may be nothing, *that is, that non-being may be nothingness*.

This possibility is the extreme folly of 'God'.

It is the same extreme folly which is proper to the West, and which by now already dominates the Earth as a civilisation of technics. The 'Creator', today, is this civilisation.

'Creators' have things at their disposal: they make them come from nothingness and carry them back into it. The thing, that which is non-nothing, is nothing for them. Extreme folly is the soul of 'Creators'. This folly is called *nihilism*.

The most humble of things, instead, is eternal in a sense abyssally more profound than the eternity of 'God': it is the abyss dividing it from the present folly in the eternity of 'God'. All the 'eternals' evoked by mortals are morbid.

The eternal 'God' of Christianity (and each of the 'Gods' of the West and the East) does not succeed in being eternal as the most humble of things does, because extreme folly dominates within him. But precisely because everything is eternal, even the folly of 'God' is eternal, and that of the civilisation of technics: that is, even the enchantment in which the folly of 'God' is evoked, and in which is evoked the folly of our civilisation.

The folly of 'God' is the same folly of the atheist. The atheist—the *insipiens* that the Bible speaks of—says in his heart:

"God is not." He means to say that what exists is only the world, the set of things that emerge from nothingness, return to it and could have remained in it.

But even God says in his heart: "This world, which I bring out of nothingness, I could have left as a nothing and could annihilate it once more." The atheist's insipience is essentially the same insipience as that of 'God'.

But it is the same essential insipience proper to all mortals. Mortals are 'demons'. In ancient Greek, *dàimon* also means 'divider'. Mortals, like the divine, divide things from their being.

They believe they are dividing things and that things are before them without roots, ready to be assigned to nothingness or to existence.

They believe to be dividing the indivisible.

This faith is the essence common to 'God' and to mortals. Inhabitants of the West and, at its peak, the civilisation of technics, have brought the folly of 'God' to its most rigorous and coherent form.

Eternal is also all that derives from this folly. Pain, punishment and violence burden the earth since the time when 'Creators', dividing things from their eternity, perceive themselves as their masters. In between 'God' and the civilisation of technics, even capitalism and the proletariat have been 'Creators'. The 'people of God', intending to fulfil the will of the 'heavenly Father', too.

Even the great burden of pain is eternal: like the most humble and irrelevant of things, it is too the 'highest constellation of Being'.

But constellations of Being are not just tossed around at random, in the same way as stars may seem positioned in the sky at random.

Eternal are extreme folly and pain; but eternal, in their being, always already overcome by Joy. Folly and pain always already stay eternally overwhelmed within Joy: lamps lit under the sunlight.

'All is eternal' means: 'the Whole is Joy'. The variation of things is like the trajectory of the sun in the sky. We do not say that the sun comes from nothingness at dawn, and returns to it after it sets; but that the sun continues to shine eternally even when, during the night, it disappears from view.

Every thing has the same nature as the sun: in the same way as the sun enters and exits from the vault of the sky, the variation and becoming of things is their entering and exiting, as eternal celestial bodies of Being, from the vault of appearance.

We are Joy.

We, mortals: those who hold faith in being the masters of things.

Mortals are the Joy of the Whole, but they believe themselves to be mortals, masters and creators.

Under the layer that covers them, shines the Joy of the Whole. Joy is the essential unconscious of mortals. The layer is extreme folly, that is, their faith, what they believe to be seeing and doing.

Today we believe we are seeing the dominion of technics over earth, which, in its most visible form, shows itself as the confrontation between capitalist organisation and socialist organisation of technological power.

But from afar, enigmatically, Aeschylus says in *Prometheus*: "Art [*tekhnê*] is much weaker than necessity."

Have we recounted a myth? Certainly we have, if the traits of the account appear without their Necessity appearing, too. *Necessitas* is *ne-cedere*, not conceding to any "No" directed against the one who does not concede.

Among mortals, 'necessity' has always been what masks the overpowering of myth and faith. Outside of extreme folly, Necessity is the heart and vocation of things. Its authentic sense remains in the essential unconscious of mortals.

To the extent that, thus, the traits of the account appear without their Necessity appearing too, the account—to this extent—appears as a myth. And as a weak myth.

Christianity is also myth. So is science. They cannot demonstrate in fact (the same has occurred to philosophy) the Necessity to their own accounts.

But they are powerful myths: their decisive power consists in the fact that people believe in them. And the myth now already imposing itself above all myths is that of science and technics, because today—apart from those transitory crises—no one any longer doubts the capacity of the scientific operation to dominate. There are no longer doubts that science manages to realise what religion can only promise.

For some time, I have spoken in my writings of the Necessity to the traits of the account above recalled. But how many equivocations have arisen apropos! At times, the content of my writings is discussed with the level of competence one may have, for instance, when saying: Marx was a capitalist, due to the fact he has written a vast treatise on capital.

A 'myth', therefore, can appear in the form of our account. And it is a weak myth, because no one believes in it.

But let us listen still to yet another part.

Those who speak imply that they are saying something unbeknownst to those who listen. Thus speak, first and foremost, chiefs, prophets, scientists, poets, and philosophers. Would there have been any need, otherwise, for a "Saviour" announcing to everyone the "Good News"—the good news that human beings hear for the first time from the heavenly envoy?

Still, when language speaks of the traits of such account in terms of Necessity, *it does not say things unbeknownst to those listening*.

Those listening are the young and the old, the poor and the rich, the good and the evil, the mad and the sane. And again: the happy and the unhappy, the intelligent and the idiot, the awake and the dormant, the alive and the dead.

When speaking of Necessity, listening to *all* of them (do we truly believe that we know how the dead and the dormant listen?) is not a void waiting to be filled, a journey from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge, but it is the place where the Necessity of the account eternally appears.

All their capacities to listen are in themselves already, even before language speaks, appearance of the eternity of the Whole, appearance that the Whole is Joy and that we are all Joy. The essential unconscious of mortals—that unconscious staying in an infinitely deeper underground of the unconscious which their folly consists in, that is, within the persuasion that the entity is nothing—is 'omniscience', knowing and being the Whole with Necessity. The most humble and poorest of hearings is infinitely

more profound than that of the 'God' of Abraham, of Jesus, or of the philosophers.

In the depths of the extreme folly of mortals there remains, instead, Nietzsche's confidence that 'Necessity' is something *he alone* has 'seen' and 'loved'. Even Nietzsche's 'Necessity' is a mask of the authentic sense of Necessity. Even Nietzsche, in fact, is a 'Creator'.

But like every hearing, even his hearing, below the mortal layer of folly, is the appearance of the sincere Necessity of what has been here presented in the guise of the weakest myth. The myth no one believes in, but of whose necessity—the Necessity that it would be a non-myth—each one is the eternal appearance.

7.
THE UNCONSCIOUS OF THE WEST

In psychoanalysis, and in psychology in general, the assertion of the existence of the unconscious and the determination of its structure are scientific hypotheses supplied with a certain degree of empirical confirmation. Psychology is a science and science has become the dominant trait of the West.

To speak about the 'unconscious of the West' is thus not to apply the psychoanalytical category of the unconscious to an extremely complex social formation. It has nothing to do with, for example, the concept of 'collective unconscious' elaborated by Jung.

The unconscious of the West is the thought, that is, the essential will, guiding the development of Western civilisation; which, nonetheless, remains inaccessible to the consciousness of itself that the West may have.

Inaccessible, thus, also to psychoanalysis.

The language that speaks about the unconscious of the West hails from beyond the borders of the West. But these borders now already surround the earth and the sky, mortals and gods; and the past and the East are only the prehistory to Western civilisation.

Something like 'the West' only appears inside the *interpretation*, that is, the will that assigns an additional sense to events.

According to Marx, instead, "in any historical or social science... categories express forms of existence and conditions of existence" (*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*). That is, Marx exchanges the categories constituting the content of interpretation for the categories that "express forms of existence and conditions of existence." The 'worker' and 'capital' (and every social category—and, indeed, society itself) are not 'givens': they only appear as such within the will which wants

that the 'given' would have a certain additional sense, with respect to the given sense.

Before interpreting a dream, it is necessary to interpret the very language expressing it.

And, even prior to that, it is necessary to interpret certain events (sounds, signs) as language. Language is not a 'given': it is a *willed*. That language exists is not an observation, but an interpretation.

The interpreting will *wants* the sense that is given, but this will complies with certain rules. The rules of the interpreting will, on the basis of which something like 'the West' appears, enable to enlarge the field obtained on the basis of their application. Those very same rules enable, that is, the reduction of all languages of the West to the *fundamental language* of the West. This reduction is, precisely, the *enlargement* of the field obtained by putting into place the rules of the interpreting will (by understanding that to discover the foundation of a field is, precisely, an enlargement of the field).

The content of that field is known to Western culture: what in this culture may be at a lack (as it is, for instance, in Marx's case) is the consciousness that it is an interpreted content. The enlargement (in the sense here above indicated) of this field thus leads beyond the consciousness the West has of its own content.

But it does not lead yet to the unconscious of the West.

It leads to what is the *preconscious* of the West.

The reduction of all languages of the West to the fundamental language of the West is, in fact, the reduction to the language that expresses the sense of the thingness of the thing.

In the West, the thing is 'that which is': a synthesis between 'that which' and its 'is'. But the essence of this synthesis is its *accidentality*: a thing is something ('that') which *is*; but in the sense that the thing, as such, is, but (before) was not and (then) will not be; and that it is in the way that it may have not been.

The fundamental language of the West is the language of Greek onto-logy. The 'entity' is specifically, for Greek thought, 'that which is', the accidental synthesis between 'that which' and its 'being'.

The language of Greek ontology is the preconscious of the West, because many inhabitants of the West don't even believe they are speaking it. It is science, first and foremost, which does not believe to be speaking it. But then also all those forms of thought—neopositivism, analytical philosophy, empiricism, pragmatism—which believe that the language of Greek ontology belongs to a past, from which Western culture has now already liberated itself.

But the language of Greek ontology is the preconscious of the West, since the West *can* become conscious of its own fundamental language: it can become conscious of it *by remaining the West*. The West in fact is the land where there reigns the will that the thing is entity: that is, that which is in the same way as that which was not, will not be and may have not been.

'The thing was' means: 'The thing that by being is not a nothing, was a nothing.' 'The thing will not be' means: 'The thing will be a nothing.' 'It may have not been' means: 'It may have remained a nothing.'

The fundamental folly of science consists in its present incapacity to glimpse, within its own language, the decisive presence of the language of Greek ontology. But the incapacity is only temporary. *Inside the West*, the language of Greek ontology *may* emerge from the unconscious: for it is precisely a *preconscious*.

But ties of Necessity unite the fundamental language of the West to *nihilism*.

The ties of Necessity are not apparent to the eyes of the West. They can only be indicated by a language drawing insight from what remains beyond the borders of the West.

Nihilism is the persuasion, that is, the will for the entity, insofar as it is an entity, to be nothing. What is said in the fundamental language of the West—in what forms the preconscious of the West—is tied with Necessity to nihilism.

The nothingness of the entity—the will for stars, plants, human beings, the whole earth to be nothing—is what in the fundamental language of the West is continuously re-stated. But the argument remains hidden. In the immediacy of the language of the West, the argument appears in inverse terms. But inside its

own *consciousness*, rather, the West desires that the entity were *not* nothing.

But the entity, ever since the Greeks, is that which has been and will still be nothing. From beyond the borders of the West, Necessity shows the ties which unite to the nothingness of the entity—to nihilism—its having been nothing, and its being in order to be nothing.

Thus speaks the West (its own speaking appears inside the interpretation); its own speaking is reducible to the fundamental language evoked by Greek ontology once and for all. This language is the preconscious of the West. It speaks of the thingness of things, that is, of their emergence from and return to nothingness.

But what is said by the preconscious of the West is tied with Necessity to nihilism. Such tie is not a scientific hypothesis.

But the language of the West—the fundamental language and every language of the West—distances from itself that which ties it to Necessity, removes it and expresses it in an inverted and indirect way. The nothingness of the entity is what the West continues to speak of, but indirectly and in an inverted way, so that it does not surface in the immediate sense of language.

Nihilism is then the essential *unconscious* of the West. It is extreme folly. The extreme folly that can occur within the Whole.

Thus, the West cannot become conscious of the content of its own unconscious, because it would become conscious of its own folly: it would decline before its very own self.

But if nihilism is the unconscious of the West, should it not perhaps be said that the land beyond the borders of the West, from which hails the language indicating the unconscious of the West, *is the unconscious of the unconscious* of the West?

8.
THE EAST IS AN ALTERNATIVE?

"What business have you with saving the world, when all the world needs is to be saved from you? Get out of the picture and see whether there is anything left to save." "If you really care to help the world you must step out of it." "The only help worth giving is freeing from the need for further help."

Echoes of ancient Eastern wisdom are thus still reaching us. Much more ancient than Christianity, welcoming the latter as an assembly of kings welcomes a new king.

India's liberation from British dominion has been accompanied by a return to the originary sources of the Indian civilisation. With the consciousness that, by keeping themselves close to them, it was possible to be in dialogue, at least as equals, with Western civilisation. Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Tagore, Aurobindo and Gandhi were those guiding that return.

In the *Upanishads* (the first 'philosophical' texts of India, written eight centuries prior to Christ) it is said that, after death, souls present themselves to Brahman so as to be interrogated. Brahman is the reality that is immutable, eternal, infinite, blessed, principle and 'pillar' of everything that exists; God.

Brahman asks: "Who are you?" Those souls who cannot answer fall back down on earth, to begin a new life. They answer thus: "I am so and so; I am the one who succeeded in such and such enterprise; who had such and such quality."

But 'those in the know' answer: "I am that which you are." And when Brahman asks: "Who am I then?", they answer: "The Truth."

That is, what they know is that all we believe ourselves to be is only an appearance, an illusion. We believe to be human beings, mortals, errant and unhappy sinners who need help and

salvation, and instead the true 'Self' belonging to each of us is the same Being, as eternal and blessed as Brahman.

In the *Chandogya Upanishad*, at the end of every explanation that shows how Being is animated by the whole, the master addresses to the disciple the notorious formula: "*Tat tvam asi*—That art thou." You, beyond every appearance, are the eternal beatitude of Brahman.

What their true 'Self' may be—their 'Atman' (this Sanskrit word means, at the same time, 'breath' and 'self')—is in other words something human beings can come to know even prior to death. Their 'awakening' shows to them they always already exist, and liberates them from the human condition. 'Buddha' means precisely 'the enlightened', 'the reawakened'.

The reawakened no longer feel desires, no longer wish for happiness, power, pleasure, joy, wealth: no longer want life and its plots, no longer wish to save anyone.

With desire, in fact, human beings want to be something different from their true 'Selves', they identify with something other: believing to be the masks under which their selves hide, they lose sight of themselves.

This does not mean that desire no longer exists, but that the reawakened detach themselves from it, exit the scene of desire, look at it and see it unfold as something no longer belonging to them. 'Their' actions, 'their' feelings, states of mind and thoughts are no longer their own, but belong to those acting on the scene.

Dormants confuse the scene with reality. The reawakened exit the scene and see it as produced by desire and by ignorance. The 'Self' is precisely 'the one who sees', "the isolated, indifferent Witness, simple inactive spectator."

In India there is still someone claiming to have exited the scene and to be the eternal Witness—who claims it, I mean, with words and attitudes that keep intact the dignity of wisdom. Presented by Elémire Zolla and Grazia Marchianò in a suggestive way, the first volume of *I am that* has of recent been translated into Italian: the dialogues, as the subtitle reads, are of a 'learned from the village', Nisargadatta Maharaj, a Bombayan tobacconist that today must be almost ninety years old and about whom

we would know nothing, if it were not for Maurice Frydman—a follower of his, born in Krakow (Poland), who has spent the last years of his life nearby the master—annotating what Maharaj responded to whomever felt the need to go to him. The sentences noted at the start of this chapter are his.

Beyond acknowledging his own ignorance (unlike Vivekananda, who, according to Schopenhauer, had not understood the *Upanishads*), Maharaj says nothing new with respect to the *Advaita Vedanta*, that is, the most rigorous way in which Indian thought has understood the identity between the Self and Brahman.

But he says to have experience of this identity, to have attained the "immovable state, which is not affected by the birth and death of a body or a mind," "rock-like, unassailable; a solid mass of pure being-consciousness-bliss. I am never out of it."

A single mass that cannot be described and analysed as phenomena in the world, and with respect to which the most apt word is silence: "My silence sings. You cannot know my world until you are there."

But to all his interlocutors Maharaj never tires to repeat what his master had told him, once upon a time: "Trust me, I tell you. Take it as the absolute truth. Remember it always. You are God, your will alone is done." "I did believe him."

And it is specifically this faith that is the decisive means (the true 'yoga') through which every human being can catch sight of their finding themselves, always already, within the land of the master.

Here faith does not simply move the mountains, but it makes human beings see their being God (and thus their being in so much proximity to their 'neighbours' as to be indistinguishable from them).

And, on the other side, is this not precisely the core of Jesus' preaching: his own faith in being God? For the Christianity of the first centuries, the heresy par excellence is gnosticism, the doctrine that invites every human being to say about themselves exactly what Jesus has the courage to say: "I am God," that is, "I am That."

But gnosticism hails from the East, it derives from the same sources which even Maharaj draws from.

And thus we reach the underlying question.

For the Western mentality, the wisdom of the East is something incommensurable, inadmissible: it is to renounce the world against the will to dominate and 'improve' it (whether this will is God's will, or the will of a Christian, or otherwise the will expressing itself in the civilisation of technics); it is to be convinced that birth and death, suffering, happiness, actions are illusory images, counter to the confidence they are what is most real in human existence.

Still, these impressions remain on the surface of the problem (as remain on the surface however many have believed they could see, in my writings, the presence of Eastern thought).

Between the third and second century B.C., Aryan peoples spread both westwards and eastwards. A single type of civilisation, an identical linguistic structure, moving in opposite directions.

The most ancient texts of the Indo-European civilisation—the *Vedas*, which perhaps date back to mid-third century B.C.—belong to the Aryans invading India. Peoples that succeed in the most gigantic migration ever to have occurred on earth are not keen in renouncing the world or in considering it an illusion.

The most ancient *Veda* represent those peoples that aspire to enjoy life. And not only do they dominate the world, but also the Gods. With ritual 'sacrifice'—a decisive event, which still remains unfathomed in its authentic sense—they make Gods bend to their will, and take care to keep alive the same cosmic order. The originary meaning of 'Brahman' is 'prayer', 'magical force'. A Vedic text says "the sun would not rise if the priest, at dawn, did not offer the oblation of fire."

The civilisation of technics, which in the West intends to reconstruct the world, is the most direct outcome of this sacrificial will. Religious sacrifice has become scientifico-technological calculation, which has taken out of the way every immutable and eternal reality.

In India, over the centuries, the evolution of sacrifice has been different: still, the intent is always that of making it truly effectual, that is, that of making human beings truly masters of the world.

All this is obtained through a radical solution: by rendering the world illusory and exercising a 'technique'—that of yoga—which, in its clearest and rigorous sense, grants human beings the ability to perceive themselves as identical to God.

It is the will to be infinitely powerful that pushes us to consider things in the world and their becoming as illusory, and to think that, beneath the appearance, their true soul is the Human-God, that is, Brahman-Atman, conceived as eternal and undifferentiated.

Elémire Zolla observes that Vivekananda's and Aurobindo's attempts to couple the *Vedas* with modern science are completely absent in Maharaj. Undoubtedly, Maharaj is as clear and elevated as much as the other two are gasping and maintaining the volume of their voices the loudest.

But the importance that the Maharaj, and all the culture he is inspired by, assign to faith in the master is indicative.

Jesus' faith, that grants him the ability to move mountains; the faith that it is through listening to the master that one's own divinity is seen; the faith that it is through following the precepts of modern science that the world is dominated: they all have the same essence.

To a Western interlocutor, Maharaj says:

> When I talk of trusting me, it is only for a short time, just enough time to start you moving. After all, what I am offering you is the operational approach, so current in Western science. When a scientist describes an experiment and its results, usually you accept his statements on trust and repeat his experiment as he describes it. Once you get the same or similar results, you need not trust him any more; you trust your own experience.

The West has conquered the East. Starting from Alexander the Great. But they both come from the same source; even if the two rivers, one departing from the other, have ended up considering one another as foreign.

9.
SCIENTIFIC SPECIALISATION AND NOTHINGNESS

1

The specialised character of science now already belongs to the essence of scientific research and praxis. There is no science where there is no specialisation, that is, application of the experimental method to a particular field of objects. It is a rather recent circumstance in the history of our civilisation. But this way of considering the world, which is enacted in scientific specialisation, is much more ancient. It can be traced back to the time when human beings began to perceive themselves as autonomous centers of action, that is, as capable of *decision*. It is the act of deciding that renders acting autonomous; if one acts without deciding, one depends on something other. The sense of scientific specialisation, let us say, is essentially tied to the sense of decision. But does this claim make any sense, and how is it even possible?

Specialisation is the act of turning to the *species*. In its original meaning, *species* is the aspect, appearance, figure; that which thus lets itself be seen. The ancient Latin verb *specere* means precisely "to see", in the strong sense of "looking towards an object, an end goal, a scope". To *spec-ere* corresponds the Greek *sképt-ein*; and, from the etymological point of view, the Greek word corresponding to *spec-ies* is *skop-ós*, which specifically means "scope", "goal", "that towards which one observes and looks". The visibility of the *species* is that according to which the latter can be observed, analysed, controlled, measured, desired, feared, refused, escaped.

The *species* is all the more visible when it is least conflated with what surrounds it, that is, when it is most distinguished and

divided from its backdrop. All the more visible, the less that what encompasses the *species* overlaps with it by shrouding it and altering it; that is, the more it is kept far apart and divided from its surroundings. This attitude is one of the determining factors that has lead human beings outside of the existence guided by myth, where instead the context invades, overlaps and enmeshes itself with what is surrounded by it; and thus, where a thing can be many other things at one time: tree or animal, and at the same time demon; wind and voice of the gods; food and the vital force of the ancestors; earth fissure and maternal womb.

The force with which human beings have freed themselves from this mode of feeling has led them towards the opposite extreme: here comes to light the conviction that the necessity to keep the context far apart from the thing (in order for it to be visible and constitute itself specifically as *species* and *skopós*) is equivalent to the independence that the visibility of the *species* has from the visibility of its context; the conviction of the *difference* between things (for instance, between earth fissure and the maternal womb) becomes conviction that the visibility of a thing is independent of the visibility of the context in which the thing finds itself (and, in general, that is independent of the visibility of other things). In the meantime, the physical sense of "visibility" extends itself and the visible becomes the observable, the attemptable, the knowable. The visibility of the *species* is understood as independent of the visibility of other *species*; and when modern science understands in a rigorous way such independence, what comes to light is scientific specialisation: specifically that which *isolates* a part (*species*) of reality and separates it from others, so as to be able to observe without limits its configuration and behaviour. The absence of limits to observation is proportional to the radicality of the separation, and the isolation, of those observed.

The criterion, for delimiting the part to which scientific specialisation refers to, is given by the principle that the delimitation only holds scientific value if its prescinding from the context does not alter knowledge of the part; and only if it does not impede its utilisation in view of the ends that the research proposes

itself. If such principle, in this more abstract formulation, is clear, difficulties only arise when one wishes to apply it. Science not only excludes in principle that a determinate zone of the context, at first regarded as inessential to the isolated part, subsequently reveals itself to be essential to it, and such that therefore one cannot prescind from it; but the general direction science is developing towards is a progressive enlargement of those contexts from which specialised research can prescind.

2

Human beings no longer let themselves be guided by myth when they begin to feel themselves as the centre of action capable of *deciding*. Undoubtedly, even when they regulate their own existence on the basis of the mythical sense of the world, human beings decide and act: they pick the fruits of the earth, hunt and domesticate animals, construct shelters, copulate, struggle against enemies. But in their acting and deciding, they alert the presence of divine Forces sustaining the universe. They sense their acting not as being *their own*, but as being the acting of the Whole itself. Precisely for this reason, by acting and deciding, they do not feel separated and isolated from the Whole; and in this sense, properly speaking, they do not "decide". Even in this case, language reveals the sense which human beings ascribe to the world. The Latin word *decido* means first of all (that is, even prior to "taking a decision") "I cut", "I cut off from". *Decido* is in fact equivalent to *de-caedo*, which means "I strike, so as to *separate* the struck *from* that which it was united with." Precisely because of this, *caedo* also means "I kill"[1], in its turn deriving from the Latin *oc-cido*, which again means *ob-caedo* (where *ob-* indicates that *against* which the *caedere* is performed).

This closeness between deciding and killing may seem forced. Certainly, it is believed that decision and decisive human beings

1 Severino here is referring to the Italian word *uccido*, "I kill", and its etymological root in the Latin word *oc-cido*. The Latin root *caedo* can also be found in current English, for instance in the word "deceased".

realise a separating act, but it is thought to concern that act which separates the choice made from the alternative choice, and which liberates from indecision. In the indecision, alternative choices are equipotent and therefore maintain themselves united in front of the will; and, thus united, they impede action. Decision separates the unity of equipotent alternatives that render action impossible. If one were to use a metaphor, which appears too strong to be illuminating, one could say that decision "kills" the alternative choice.

Still, this way of considering the act of deciding remains on the surface. Every decision in fact impedes a way of living, both for the one deciding and for the one who is subjected to the effect of the decision; and the set of decisions determining our life impede the life or lives we could have lived, or could have made others live, and towards which we often look with such regret and pain that, in spite of differences, often have the intensity of those we can feel for life effectively destroyed (by others or by nature). To say that deciding kills the life we could have lived is not an exaggeration.

Not only that, but what we have started to bring to light is an even deeper meaning than the disquieting proximity between deciding and killing; where that which is separated is not only the unity of equipotent choices maintained in the indecision, and where that which is killed is not only the life which *one could have* lived, but the life that is *effectively* lived. Language expresses the profound consonance between deciding and killing, because the reproposed wisdom of the language forming these words still looks at the Whole that manifests itself through myth, and which is a *living* Whole. A Whole where every part is indispensable to others and where, therefore, the separation and isolation of the parts is their killing, their no longer being what they were when they found themselves united, that is, alive. When in the existence guided by myth human beings alert, in their acting and willing, the action and will of the Whole, their acting does not turn to the world by separating and isolating the parts: their acting does not separate *from* the Whole, because their own is the acting *of* the Whole. Here, alternative choices are the pure negativity of life separated from the Whole: the acting does not impede something,

but impedes sinking into the darkness. Possible lights are not impeded from shining, but we keep ourselves tight to the light.

But then arrive the epochs in which human beings no longer feel the Whole in their acting, but begin to perceive themselves as autonomous centres of action and will. It is a process that begins in the very inside of the existence regulated by myth, when it seems impossible that *every* acting, even the most irrelevant and banal, would be the acting of the Whole; and, in a particular way, when it reflects on the *transgressions*, that is, on the acting that is non-compliant with the one where the social group perceives the totality of Forces regulating the world to be the protagonist. Myth, then, elaborates an antagonism in the very inside of divine Forces, and begins to distinguish a "sacred time" from a "profane time": the former one where human beings feel, in their acting, the acting of the Whole and of divine Forces that are pleasing to them; the second one where human beings, in their acting, perceive only their own initiative. Starting to perceive themselves as the principle of action, they take the first step in a journey which will bring them to regard themselves as the single principle of action. The scientifical-technological Apparatus that today dominates the earth is the way in which human beings, by overcoming modern 'individualism' itself, both objectivate and pose themselves as the supreme principle of acting and deciding.

Along the path leading to the domination of Technics, the more human beings feel autonomous, the more they feel the Whole to be outside of themselves; the more they feel as if they are authors and masters (and thus in charge) of the actions they perform, the more their acting becomes an act of deciding. If the Whole is felt as a living unity, the conviction that each human has of being an autonomous principle (however limited) of acting is perceived and expressed specifically as *de-cision*, that is, as isolation and separation that *kills* the living unity. The proximity between deciding and killing is a phenomenon general to all Indo-European languages. The Greek *kríno* means, at the same time, "I separate" and "I decide"; and the German verb *entscheiden* ("to decide"—where the prefix *ent-* corresponds to the Latin *de-*) is constituted by *scheiden*, which means "to separate".

3

But that to decide is to separate is not only something language teaches us. In our civilisation, whoever decides the simplest or most complex thing is convinced of being and having *everything* required for the realisation of what she or he decides, and therefore that nothing else is required. I decide to take an object in my hand (I decide it, that is, I do not find myself having taken it inadvertently). In this decision it is not the existence of the object that is decided (I do not decide that it exists), nor the existence of my hand (I do not decide to have the hand): I decide that the object has come to find itself in my hand. But if I were convinced that the object is indissolubly tied to the place in which it finds itself, I would not decide to take it in my hand. Since we are convinced that by extending an arm or by getting on our tiptoes the sun does not let itself be grasped, we never decide to take the sun in our hands. (The mad themselves, when they decide to take the sun in their hands, decide it because they believe that, by extending an arm, they can grasp it, and not because, in spite of being convinced that the sun is impossible to grasp, they decide to grasp it anyway.) If I were convinced that the object I want to take in my hand is dominated by some force unknown to me (natural, human or divine), capable to impede any handle I may hold over the object, I would not decide to take it in my hand. I can certainly try to defeat such force; but what I would be deciding, then, would not be to take an object in my hand, but to try to defeat the force impeding me from doing so.

Therefore: I decide to take in my hand an object *only* if I am convinced that the state in which it finds itself (for instance, its being laid on the table) is not united to the rest of the world by an indissoluble bond; and, thus, *only* if I am convinced that such state is separated and isolated (or separable and isolatable) from the context in which it finds itself. However numerous ties may be, uniting the object laid on the table to the rest of the world, I only decide to grasp the object *if I am convinced* that those ties can *all* be dissolved, by the gesture of my hand, grasping the object. I decide to grasp the object, because I am convinced that,

insofar as what concerns its staying in my hand, it is separate and isolated from the rest of the world and it depends uniquely on me.

Perceiving themselves as autonomous and free, modern human beings do not sense, in their deciding, the presence of the Whole; their own is not the acting of the totality of the divine or its reflection; and, thus, to decide is to separate the part from the Whole. Even prior to constructing a hydroelectric station, which separates the water of a river or lake from the state in which it finds itself originarily, united to the rest of the world, the *decision* to construct a station in itself *assumes* water as something originarily separated from its context; that is, as something that can be known and utilised independently of all the infinite dimensions of the universe, and that does fall within the *finite* set of factors which scientific knowledges at our disposal regard as being related to the construction of a hydroelectric station. To decide is to be convinced of constituting an autonomous centre of action, uniquely on which depends what is being decided, as well as the thing invested by the decision. In the same way that scientific specialisation isolates the *species* from its context and places knowledge of the *species* as independent of knowing the context, the decision considers the part, on which it exerts itself, as isolated and independent of the context. That is, the decision considers itself capable to untie all those links de facto uniting the part to the context; and, thus, it considers knowing the context as irrelevant to the knowledge of what it intends to transform. Scientific specialisation is the most radical form of deciding.

4

By observing that the specialisation of modern science realises in itself, and in a radical way, that very same isolating attitude according to which decision and action in human existence are constituted as no longer guided by myth, we have not turned yet to the most essential aspect of the problem. If every decision assumes that the things on which, and of which, it decides are

separate from the rest of the world, *in what state are things in the world?* In the world, are things united or separated? The problem cannot be avoided.

It is beyond doubt that human beings decide—and by now they already decide on everything—only insofar as they see the world as an aggregate of parts not united by indissoluble ties. If the world appeared to them as an infinite network, whose nodes are the things and whose threads cannot absolutely be torn apart, human beings would not be able to take the most irrelevant of decisions; because even within such decisions, trying to take possession of the smallest nodes in the network, they would be forced to take possession of all the other infinite nodes; that is, the decision ought to transform the infinite Whole. We can decide to take an object in our hand only if we are convinced that the node to which it corresponds is united to other nodes of the network by threads that can be torn to pieces. But if threads were truly incorruptible and inviolable, *deciding* would be the illusion of breaking and violating them; illusory would be that world obtained by deciding, and thus even by that form of deciding which modern scientific specialisation consists in.

Decision and scientific specialisation are only possible if there is *no necessary* connection between the things to which they turn their attention. Reflection on the meaning of "necessity" begins with philosophy, that is, with the originary form of Western rationality. Myth, certainly, conceives the Whole as living, as a dimension whose parts are indissolubly united. But myth does not say what the "indissolubility" of such union consists in; and it does not say it because, first and foremost, it does not say in what consists the indissolubility of ties uniting the words of the discourse by which myth itself is formed. Since it does not show the sense of the necessity to its discourse, it cannot even show the sense of necessity to those ties uniting parts to the Whole. Precisely for this reason, philosophy is born by rejecting the discourse and universe of myth, and goes seeking for the authentic *necessity* of discourse and the world. (Such necessity is also the same one allowing to trace in a determinate way the confines of the Whole).

From the Greeks to Hegel, philosophical thought is convinced to have discovered the authentic sense of necessity. Nonetheless it is specifically in philosophical thought that, for the first time and in the most peremptory and conscious way, the acting of human beings is understood as decision. Looking at the substance, it can be said that everything which today is affirmed regarding human action operates within what Plato and Aristotle have thought about it. In the Western philosophical tradition, necessity and decision can coexist, since philosophy, by being born, brings to light both the radical sense of necessity and the radical sense of *becoming*. Or rather, it is precisely because philosophy thinks becoming in a radical way that it comes to think necessity in a radical way. It is a matter of understanding that philosophical thought, bringing to light the radical sense of becoming, opens up the dimension which renders possible the separation of things, the decision; and, thus, the very specialisation of modern science.

5

Specialisation, it has been said, holds scientific value only if the separation of the *species* from the context does not alter it, and only if it does not prejudice the objectives intended to be realised through its transformation. And this is possible only if there exists no necessary connection between the *species* and its context. In its turn, decision is possible only if the *species* on which, and of which, it is decided, is not united to the world by necessity. But what is required in order for the necessary connection *not* to exist?

If things in the world were always already, and forever remained, in the state in which they find themselves at a certain instant, it would not be possible to separate them from that state (it would not be possible to transform them). It would not be possible, thus, to think them as separable. Their immutable permanence would be the nexus uniting them by necessity. In order for the necessary connection *not* to exist, it is necessary for the world to be transforming itself. Necessary, but not sufficient;

because it is possible to think that a necessary connection unites the point of departure and the point of arrival of the transformation. We are speaking, in fact, of necessary transformations. But in a transformation where the point of departure is connected by necessity to the point of arrival, what constitutes the point of arrival *is already in some way present* in what constitutes the point of departure. A necessary connection between two terms means, in fact, that one is unthinkable without the other and that, therefore, one is in some way present in the other. In a transformation where point of departure and point of arrival are by necessity connected, what constitutes the point of departure contains *already* in some way the point of arrival, and what constitutes the latter contains *again* in some way the point of departure. "In some way", because if the point of departure already contained "in every way" (that is, without remainder, absolutely) the point of arrival, and this again contained "in some way" the point of departure, there would be no transformation. In order for the transformation *not* to be a necessary connection, it is thus necessary that the point of departure should not already contain *in any way* the point of arrival, and that the latter should no longer contain *in any way* the point of departure. But to say that something *is not present in any way* in the point of departure and in the point of arrival of a transformation means to say that of such thing, in the point of departure and point of arrival, *there is nothing*; it means that in the point of departure and in the point of arrival *such something is nothing*. This does not mean that at the beginning of the transformation there is not yet anything, nor even that at the end of it there is nothing left of the world. The transformation, however, is *not* a necessary connection only if what arrives in the point of arrival is nothing in the point of departure, and if that which departs from the point of departure is nothing in the point of arrival. If we were to express this in more rigorous terms, therefore, those of departure and arrival are not "points", but *planes*.

In the transformation, a point of the plane of departure introduces itself in a movement leading it to be *nothing* in the point of arrival, and a point of the plane of arrival is the result of a movement proceeding from a plane of departure where such point is *nothing*. (Where it is clear that not every point of the plane of departure and the plane of arrival is nothing.)

But the word 'nothing' cannot be understood indeterminately and in the relative and vague sense that is used in everyday language. 'Nothing' means absolute absence of every something, absolute negativity, negation of all that in one way or another *is*. All that which in one way or another *is*, has been called by Greek philosophy *tò ón*, the *essent*; and nothingness has been understood as the non-essent, *tò mè ón*. Once and for all, Greek philosophy understood transformation as the passage of the non-essent into the essent and of the essent into the non-essent. Or even: from nothingness into being and from being into nothingness.

Let us recap. There can only be decision and scientific specialisation if the parts on which they exert themselves are separated from the Whole. But they can only be separated if they are not united by a necessary connection; and the condition for the non-existence of a necessary connection is that the state of the world is not unmodifiable, that is, that it transforms itself. But the transformation can constitute itself as a non-necessary connection only if in the point of departure in no way the point of arrival is already present, and only if in the latter in no way the point of departure is still present. But the point of departure and point of arrival are not in any way present in one another only if, in the point of departure, the point of arrival is not yet anything, and only if, in the point of arrival, the point of departure no longer is, that is, it has become nothing. In order for decision and scientific specialisation to be possible, it is thus necessary to think the becoming of parts of the world as the passage from nothingness into being, and from being into nothingness. If we do not think the meaning of nothingness in a radical sense, not only are we unable to comprehend the essence of scientific specialisation, but we are not even able to *practice it*. If we leave aside the radical sense of nothingness, we limit ourselves to the *attempt* of practicing it.

We could express this turn of concepts also by saying that the condition for the non-existence of a necessary connection

between two things is that they are "contingent": such that, by being, things can *not* be, they can become nothing; such that, by not being, that is, by being nothing, things can be; such that, by being, things could have instead not been, they could have remained nothing; such that, by not being, by remaining nothing, things could have instead been. The contingency of things is the condition of the possibility for their oscillation between being and nothingness, in other words, for their becoming. No necessary connection can unite to what exists something existing as that which has been nothing, will return to be nothing and could have remained nothing.

6

Now, the radical sense of nothingness is not something we have here contrived so as to render thinkable the specialised character of modern science. The radical sense of nothingness was brought to light for the first time by Greek philosophy. Specifically for this reason we stated, at the end of the fourth section, that Greek philosophy, by bringing to light the radical sense of becoming, opens up the dimension which renders possible the separation of things, the decision and the specialisation of modern science. If the world is a dimension where parts emerge from their having been nothing and their returning to being nothing, there can be no necessary connection between parts that already exist and those parts arising out of nothingness, and between parts that still exist and those parts returning (or capable of returning) into nothingness. A profound solidarity unites the philosophical thought and the scientific thought of the West.

Certainly, even before Greek philosophy brought to light the radical sense of *nothingness*—and of *being*—human beings decide and consider partial areas of reality as isolated from the Whole. But—besides the marginality of this attitude with respect to the centrality of the mythical attitude, turned to the opposite direction—if human beings do not find themselves before the radical sense of nothingness, they cannot even manage to radically separate things. And thus, on the one hand, they cannot even manage to radically decide; on the other hand, they cannot manage to establish the condition required by the specialisation of modern science. The power of scientific specialisation is given by the radicality with which human beings decide and act within it. The West decides and acts with respect to the nothingness that belongs to the essence of things and renders them reciprocally indifferent and isolated. For Western culture, nothingness now already belongs to the essence of all things, because all things, are now already thought of as in becoming: temporal, historical, contingent, perishable. This is the inevitable result of the way in which Greek philosophy has opened up the road to the West.

Nonetheless Greek philosophy, and then the entire Western philosophical tradition, not only evokes the radical sense of *becoming*, but also the radical sense of the *immutable*, and thus of the necessary connection; it places the immutable (the divine) *beyond* becoming, as the foundation of the thinkability of becoming. And it does so by thinking that if the world of becoming is one of separation, it is nonetheless necessarily connected as a whole to the world of the immutable, in the sense that it can only exist if the immutable exists.

Contemporary thought has instead arrived at the negation of *every* necessary connection, and thus—and first and foremost—also at the negation of what in the philosophical tradition unites becoming to the immutable. The world of becoming, therefore, is the totality of what exists. *All* things are separated, accidental and indifferent one towards the other, and such separation shatters both the macrophysical and the microphysical world, as well as both the infinitely great parts and the infinitely small parts of reality. Not only there exists no necessary connection between galaxies and infinitely distant dimensions in time, but not even between the elements constituting the infinitesimal particles of matter, and between an instant and the one immediately succeeding it. The statistical and probabilistic character that *all* scientific laws are now assuming is precisely the rigorous expression of the absence of necessary links between entities regulated by them. In its essence, Heisenberg's "principle

of non-determination" excludes every necessary connection between any state whatsoever of the world, and the state immediately succeeding it. And, all over again, the negation of the absolute character of the "principle of causality" and its reduction to registering empirical regularities exclude that there exist necessary ties between coexisting parts of the world. The world is an aggregate of parts juxtaposed and originarily independent and indifferent, one with respect to the other.

7

All of this means that decision, action and scientific specialisation are forms of separation which—while assuming, in Western civilisation, a radicality which has never appeared before in human history—*do not operate any violence* in the world that such civilisation brings to light. Scientific specialisation is not only a mode of *thought*, but it is also a separating *decision* and *action*. If there exists no necessary union between things, it follows that *no* separating thought, decision and action alters or tries to alter the order of things, that no effective separation of ties is a violence on the order itself of the world—since such order does not exist, for it is only one of the names used to indicate the necessary union between parts of the world. If there exists no necessary union, what falls flat is the authentic foundation on the basis of which the moral and religious tradition of the West condemns the destructiveness of certain actions. *Every* destruction, however reprehensible from the point of view of the Western tradition, is a *de-struere* (*struere* is to "place in strata", as is *sternere*, whose supine is precisely *stratum*), that is, separates one from (*de*) the other *strata* which, in their *structure*, constitute a thing, whether inanimate or living. And the extreme separation of the strata separates them because either it annihilates them, or it annihilates their structure (that is, the contingent unity they find themselves in). *Every* separation is innocent, that is, does not harm any ties claiming to unite the strata of things by necessity. It does not harm them because no

such ties, according to the dominant mode of thinking in the West, can exist. At this point, the wish to invoke the disturbing proximity of *de-ciding* and *killing*—and the incumbent presence of such proximity in that radical and extreme form of deciding which is scientific specialisation—can no longer sound as a more or less veiled condemnation of modern science, relatively to the essentially specialised character of its procedures. Every killing is innocent; as innocent is every human manipulation intending to transform its structure, by eliminating certain strata or creating new ones. Once every necessary union is denied, once nothingness, that is, is posited as belonging to the essence and the being of things, there exists no obstacle for science—as apparatus of its own specialisations and techniques, in which they become effectively operative on things—to destroy the old world and construct a new one and, indeed, infinite new ones.

These are the inevitable consequences of the thought that dominates Western civilisation and renders scientific specialisation possible: the thought of *nothingness*. Sure, we are left confused and disoriented before it. But the confusion can be the expression of that way of feeling the world which is proper to the Western tradition, but from which contemporary culture has taken away any value by negating its very foundation—by negating every necessary connection between parts of the world. Our moral exigencies cannot be the criterion on the basis of which things are to be judged, because the dominant thought of Western civilisation understands things in such a way as to remove any force from those exigencies. If nothingness belongs to the essence of things, every morality is destined to sunset: morality is founded on the concept of a necessary union, which is taken out of the way by the presence of nothingness in the world.

But exactly at this point, the authentic task for that thought, directed to the essence of modern science, opens up. It is not possible to think about such essence by prescinding from the *nothingness* which comes to light at the origin of our civilisation, and whose enlightening rather constitutes such origin. Science is essentially in relationship with nothingness. I mean this in a profoundly different sense from how one major con-

temporary thinker, Martin Heidegger, referred to it. He does not consider the absolute negativity of nothingness that Greeks thought for the first time, and thus he is unable to catch sight of the course leading, from such absolute negativity, to the extreme radicality of deciding that is proper to Western man and scientific specialisation. Even Heidegger's thought moves completely *inside* the mode in which the West understands the relationship between nothingness and things. But for reasons and ways that are essentially different—the ones we have here attempted to indicate—the problem Heidegger had glimpsed comes to full light. Science cannot comprehend its own essence independently of the nothingness that philosophical thought has evoked since its very origins. And not only can science not comprehend its own essence, but, by not comprehending it, it cannot even unfold from such essence all the practical possibilities determining the dominion of science over the world.

An even more radical problem opens up on top of this: that of the *truth* of the way in which the West has intended the relationship between nothingness and things. From the solution of this problem depends what, in the last analysis, we can think of as the truth of science.

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